Blitzed

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BIG COUNTRY

"WE MADE THE MUSIC THAT WE WANTED TO MAKE"

AIR

MOON SAFARI ADVENTURES

+

JAH WOBBLE

JAH WOBBLE

"IT WAS TRULY A DEEP KIND OF THING"

INTERVIEW

+

STEVEN JONES & LOGAN SKY
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
ALTERED IMAGES
TUBULAR BELLS
TALKING HEADS
PET SHOP BOYS
DEAD OR ALIVE
DURAN DURAN
GARY NUMAN
THE DAMNED
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ISSUE 9 // £6.49

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MEET THE TEAM

Paul Browne
A music enthusiast interested in a broad spectrum of music genres. He is the founder of the original OMD Website, while also providing design concepts and writing sleeve notes for various OMD reissues. Paul founded The Electricity Club, a dedicated blog focussed on exploring electronic music.
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Martin James
An academic, professor, and curator of a long-running multi-venue music festival. He has been a music journalist for over thirty years, having trawled the darkened recesses of the world's dingiest clubs in search of the perfect beat. He discovered his love for club life doing the merry dance from Billy's to Blitz.

Mik Scarlet
A broadcaster, journalist, musician and DJ, and is probably best known for being one of the first wheelchair users to gain a celebrity status on our TV screens. He's been a regular face in the UK media for 30 years, writing for newspapers, fashion and music magazines, and has written sleeve notes for compilations.

Lucy Robinson
Blitzed Magazine's resident Professor of 80s history, who will be contributing regular articles, and is a Professor of Collaborative History at the University of Sussex. She has researched the Falklands War, charity singles, music videos, fanzines, protests and the politics of popular culture.

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WELCOME

With the release of a much-overdue retrospective on psychedelic pop outfit The Teardrop Explodes, this issue casts an eye over the new box set Culture Bunker. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to celebrate some of the Liverpool band's memorable moments, from singles to B-sides and rarities.

But we also spend time assessing some other classic 1980s acts this issue, including David Bowie, Altered Images and The Police. We speak to rock outfit Big Country about their classic album Driving to Damascus. Meanwhile, Jah Wobble talks to Blitzed with some illuminating anecdotes from his own musical legacy, from PiL and beyond.

There's also an insightful interview with French electronic connoisseurs Air and things get brought up to date as we speak to Steven Jones and Logan Sky ahead of the release of their evocative new album Sacred Figures.

We also have plenty of live coverage with Blitzed reporting on Duran Duran, Gary Numan, Midge Ure and The Damned. So there's plenty of engaging features to enjoy in this packed issue of Blitzed!

Paul Browne / paulbrowne@blitzedmag.com

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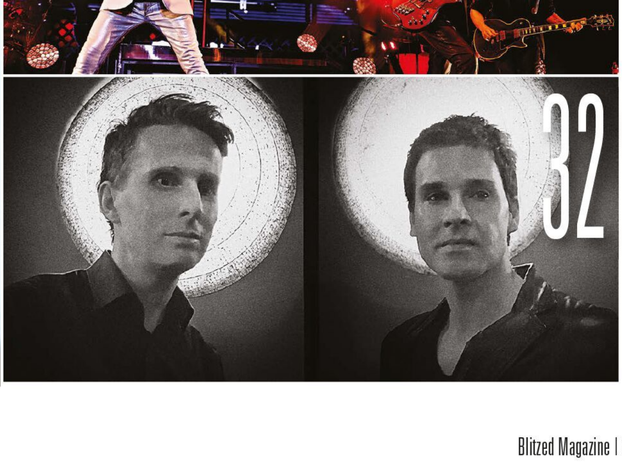
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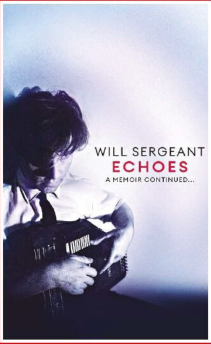
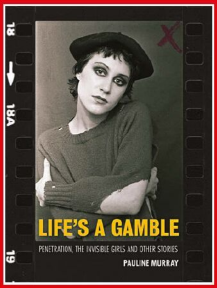
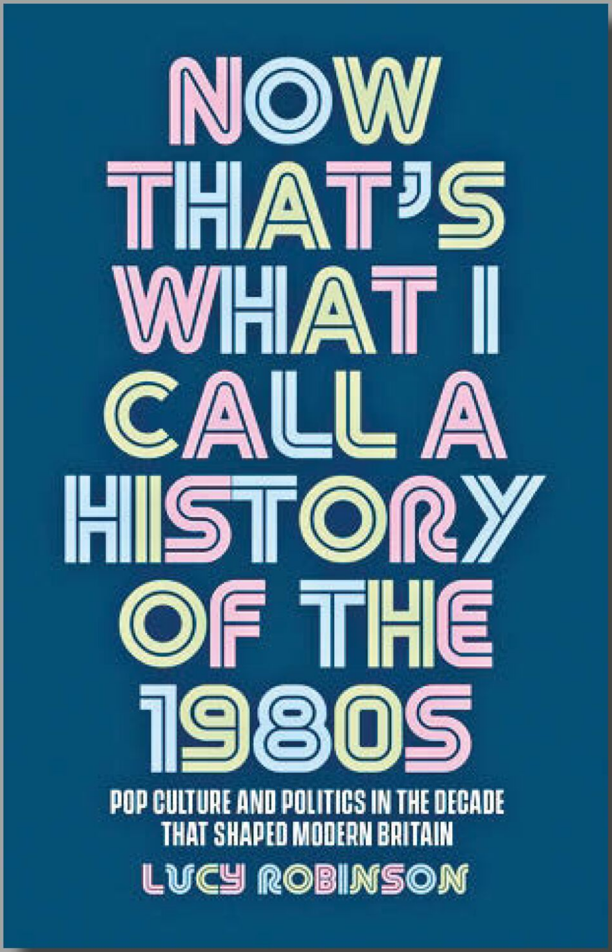
BLITZED STORIES



Echo & The Bunnymen's Will Sergeant has penned a second volume of stories following on from his successful *Bunnyman* book. In *Echoes*, the legendary recounts the band's whirlwind rise to stardom with his trademark wryness and intelligence. Sharing never-before-told anecdotes - including the heady Rockfield Studio sessions and touring across the US, playing sold-out shows at Whisky a Go Go and experiencing the iconic New York club scene from dusk 'til dawn - and accompanied by snapshots of the cultural, social and political scene at the time, this is a memoir to remember. Out 24 August via Constable.



Pauline Murray established herself as the front of the iconic band Penetration. With new book *Life's A Gamble*, she charts her journey from a small mining village in northeast England, through to becoming a key member of the punk movement. Emerging onto the punk scene at just 18 years old, inspired by an early encounter with the Sex Pistols, Pauline details how she played alongside the leading bands of the era, navigated the demands of the music industry, conquered the post-punk landscape with the Invisible Girls, opened her own music studios and reformed Penetration in 2001. Highly illustrated with unseen photographs and drawing upon Pauline's teenage diaries, interviews and archive material from her personal collection, this book chronicles the life and work of an authentic creative artist and punk rock legend. Out 14 September via Omnibus.



NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A HISTORY OF THE 1980S

A new book by Blitzed's very own Lucy Robinson tells the story of eighties Britain through its popular culture. Charting era-defining moments from Lady Diana's legs and the miners' strike to Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage and Adam and the Ants, Lucy Robinson weaves together an alternative history to the one we think we know.

This is not a history of big geopolitical disasters, or a nostalgic romp through discos, shoulder pads and yuppie culture. Instead, the book explores a mashing together of different genres and fan bases in order to make sense of our recent past and give new insights into the decade that defined both globalisation and excess.

Packed with archival and cultural research but written with verve and spark, the book offers as much to general readers as to scholars of this period, presenting a distinctive and definitive contemporary history of 1980s Britain, from pop to politics, to cold war cultures, censorship and sexuality.

Plus, Blitzed readers can get an exclusive discount of the book using a special code. Simply visit https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781526167255/ and enter BLITZED30 to receive a 30% discount on your order. *
Now That's What I Call a History of the 1980s is published 11 July via Manchester University Press

**Offer valid until 5 August 2023.*

ANARCHY IN THE UK 7" VINYL

A limited edition of the debut single from the Sex Pistols is now available as a limited-edition coloured vinyl. Their era defining opening statement as a title and a song, 'Anarchy In The UK' was the band's very first single, released on November 26, 1976. It is one of the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame's 500 Songs That Shaped Rock and Roll. The single was the only track issued under the band's deal with the EMI label, before they were dropped after the controversial Bill Grundy show appearance.

This small run of just 4576 7" singles on red vinyl is a reissued piece of music history, the song that originated the filth and fury - a must-have for any fan of the Sex Pistols or rock in general.

Anarchy In The UK is out now via UMR

HOWARD JONES NEW SONG ANNIVERSARY

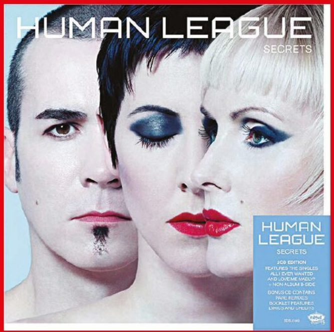
To celebrate the 40th anniversary of Howard's debut single on WEA Records, 'New Song' has been pressed as a brand-new and highly limited 7" single.

Originally released in 1983, this new edition of 'New Song' is pressed on white vinyl and limited to just 240 copies. The A-side features the 2018 remastered 7" single version, while the B-side boasts a previously unreleased live version recorded in Hamburg in 2022.

New Song is out 15 August via Cherry Red

The ever-busy Nature of Wires has been conspiring with We've Got A Fuzzbox and We're Going To Use it. *Voodoo Feline 239* is the new EP from Fuzzbox, produced by Mike Bennett (The Fall, Toyah and more) and Nature of Wires.
Featuring the amazing vocals of Sugary Staple (wife of Neville), Mike Bennett himself and of course the brilliant, inimitable Maggie Dunne. Jenny Tingle provides flute & percussion and there's a special Electromagnetic Power Mix by Kelly Hughes and Alan Keary (Aztec Camera, Jah Wobble).

A biopic about Frankie Goes To Hollywood is in the works and will focus on the making of hit single 'Relax'. The single's notoriety was established when the BBC banned the song in 1984. The film is based on Holly Johnson's memoir *A Bone In My Flute* and is to be helmed by Bernard Rose, who directed the music video for 'Relax'.



The Human League's 2001 album *Secrets* is being reissued as a 2LP half-speed mastered edition, with the album pressed on 180g black vinyl. A CD edition will also feature bonus tracks. There's also an 8-page booklet which includes the lyrics and credits. Out 11 August via Demon

ULTRAVOX QUARTET DELUXE EDITION

Ultravox's classic 1982 album Quartet is to be reissued this summer. The album featured the singles 'Reap The Wild Wind', 'We Came To Dance', 'Visions In Blue' and 'Hymn' and was produced by George Martin at AIR studios in both London and Montserrat.

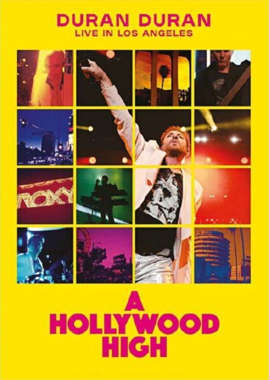
This Deluxe Edition reissue is available as a 6CD+DVD box set. It features the original 1982 version of the album, a new Steven Wilson Stereo Remix, a CD of B-sides and rarities and a liver performance recorded at Hammersmith Odeon in December 1982. The DVD features Steven Wilson's 5.1 surround mix of Quartet and the album's B-sides. The new mixes and original mixes are also available in hi-res stereo. This reissue features 70 tracks, with 47 of them previously unreleased recordings. This box comes with a 20-page booklet and a reproduction of the Quartet tour programme.

Quartet is released on 7 July via Chrysalis.

DURAN DURAN - A HOLLYWOOD HIGH

Duran Duran's legacy seems to show no signs of stopping, from their imperial era in the 1980s through to the 21st Century. This 2022 high-rise rooftop performance from Duran Duran was filmed in Los Angeles at The Aster, framed against an iconic LA skyline and the Capitol Records Tower. It's now available as a Blu-ray/DVD.

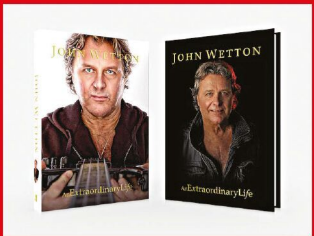
The band power through a setlist that includes classics such as 'A View To A Kill', 'Ordinary World' and 'Hungry Like The Wolf'. The performance is captured in 4K, enhanced by 5.1 and Dolby Atmos surround sound. Bonus extras include behind-the-scenes footage, and interviews.



A Hollywood High is out 4 August

Iconic Ultravox album *Vienna* is now exclusively available as a special picture disc via HMV. The 1921 Centenary Edition Picture Disc Vinyl 2021 marks a full century since the first HMV store opened its doors at 363 Oxford Street in London. To celebrate, a brand new and exclusive range of limited-edition vinyl editions is being released. *Vienna* marked the fourth studio album by Ultravox, first released in 1980 through Chrysalis Records. The album featured singles such as 'Sleepwalk', 'All Stood Still' and the top 5 title track 'Vienna'. A selection of solo works by the late Ryuichi Sakamoto have been gathered on a new Milan Records compilation titled *Travesía*. The album has been curated by Oscar-winning Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, with the album's title translating to 'journey' in Spanish.

A selection of solo works by the late Ryuichi Sakamoto have been gathered on a new Milan Records compilation titled Travesía. The album has been curated by Oscar-winning Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, with the album's title translating to 'journey' in Spanish.



John Wetton An Extraordinary Life contains the first-person testimony of some seventy-plus people who knew and worked with John from his school days and throughout his long, illustrious career, including Family, King Crimson, Uriah Heep, Wishbone Ash, Roxy Music and Asia. Among the stories of friendship, music and sometimes craziness in the book from Bill Bruford, Geoff Downes, Robert Fripp, Rick Wakeman, Phil Manzanera, Steve Hackett, Steve Howe and others, are reflections on what made John such an unforgettable musician and prog rock legend. Available via: www.johnwettonbook.com

BLITZED QUOTES

"I like to challenge myself."
Jah Wobble

"Tina has given immense pleasure to millions of people - everyone loved her, and she loved everyone right back. She was the most extraordinary performer I've ever recorded with, and the world is a much poorer place for her passing...
There can never be another Tina" - ***Martyn Ware pays tribute on the passing of Tina Turner***

"Absolute Queen. Tina sat waiting patiently in the stalls of the Wimbledon Theatre during rehearsals for the Princess Trust concert. No demands. No pulling rank. She waited a long time till it was her turn, then showed her 'backing band' below how it was done. Class personified"
Midge Ure

"Andy will always be remembered, as a kind and beautiful soul by everyone who knew him, and as a supremely gifted musician by people who love music."
- ***Johnny Marr in a touching tribute to the late Andy Rourke***

"We knew that the hype and the fashion around Air could end quite easily." ***Jean-Benoît Dunckel***

"We could play twelve bar Blues and it would still sound like Big Country." ***Tony Butler***

"If Ai is gonna be designing & making all the crap we want, who is gonna be able to buy this created shit? With no cash, cos all Jobs have been taken over by Ai? Not sure the boffins at HQ. Have thought this one through."
Echo & The Bunnymen's Will Sergeant on emerging technology

BIG SCREEN ZIGGY STARDUST

The soundtrack to of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars: The Motion Picture is being reissued, digitally restored with remastered audio.

Originally filmed at London's Hammersmith Odeon in 1973 by acclaimed filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker, the film and its soundtrack have been newly remastered with the medley of 'The Jean Genie/Love Me Do' medley and 'Round And Round' featuring the late legendary Jeff Beck reinstated - the latter track making its very first appearance anywhere. Both performances were newly mixed by long-time David Bowie collaborator Tony Visconti.

The show featured Bowie's famous speech where he revealed that he was retiring the Ziggy Stardust persona. Fifty years later, Ziggy will finally go global with a digitally restored version of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars: The Motion Picture showing at over 1000 cinemas worldwide.

"The Hammersmith gig itself was phenomenal" commented Mike Garson, "What people don't know about that gig is that I opened the show on solo piano. David asked me to be his opening act. So, for just fifteen minutes I took some of his hits, 'Changes', 'Life On Mars?' and 'Ziggy' and made a medley for the gig. I came out to do the spot and I was scared to death. So was Bowie. He told me backstage that he was more frightened for me that night than for him!"

The 50th Anniversary Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars: The Motion Picture will be available as a 2CD & Blu-ray, 2LP Limited Edition gold vinyl set and also available digitally.

Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars: The Motion Picture is out 11 August

JAH WOBBLE INTERVIEW

By Kevin Burke

Photo Credits: Alex Hurst

A staggering forty-five years since the anti-rock rumblings of Public Image Ltd began, an important cog in that outfits' experimental engine remains defiant to category. One Jah Wobble (John Wardle), the bassist who alongside John Lydon and Keith Levene formed the legendary outfit in 1978. Although he had only a brief stint before departing to carve out his own career in 1980, with PiL he was instrumental in creating their debut Public Image: First Issue. This was followed a year later with the monumental Metal Box and later the live set Paris au Printemps. Nevertheless, his departure may have come as a shock, the result is a career which has seen him collaborate on and create upwards of forty albums. "It all turned out for the good" reflects Jah, and he is right. "It is funny how things turn out. I left PiL, and I was really angry, and it felt like it was getting really silly and I didn't understand. I had gotten so frustrated because I did not feel we were working enough, you know? We weren't doing any shows really, I thought it was just lazy and the business was bad and this, that and the other. And of course it was the best thing ever. Well PiL was actually the beginning, so it got me going, and it was the beginning of everything. So I left PiL, I had loads of ideas, interests, and obviously world music, that I could not really wait to use music from around the world. But PiL was just the beginning of an adventure."

With Public Image Ltd, Jah was integral in the creation of their second album and masterpiece Metal Box (1978). Never one to completely turn his back on the album, Jah alongside guitarist and producer Jon Klien (Batcave), returned to the PiL masterwork in 2021 with Metal Box - Rebuilt In Dub. "When Cleopatra (Records) asked me did I fancy having a go at it - I think they were a little bit nervous, I think they thought I might go; "how dare you? How could one go and tackle a classic like that?" But I straight away said:

"Yeah, yeah, yeah!". I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I think they were a bit surprised because I didn't touch on any of that stuff for years. Through the nineties, not only would I not do Metal Box, but I didn't really do Dub that I can recall particularly - certainly through the eighties and early nineties. And I would not do anything to do with PiL, as you are off doing another parlor trick."

Perhaps a maturity and an embracing of the past, and with the late PiL guitarist Keith Levene, Jah began exploring his musical infancy. "As I got older in the noughties, certainly post 2010, we started doing some PiL numbers live, and doing one or two things from Metal Box. Then I got it in my head and you start hearing all these different harmonics, especially with 'Poptones' where you could literally hear string parts as you were playing it - experimenting with different tempos. When it came to redoing it, I knew exactly the kind of thing I wanted to do, so we just jumped straight in."

That he did, and Jah knew the direction he wanted to take the music in, regardless of any outside influence. "When I sent in the first tapes in, Jon Klien was like; "Are you fucking sure?". I sent him 'Albatross' I think, with these bits based on minor strings, very simple sort of stuff across it and with 'Poptones' I think he thought; "Are you sure?", and I said "Yeah just do it and it will be great", so I rolled him with it and it just worked great. It is quite grandiose music actually, and obviously you do not want it going schmaltzy, but I knew it could be expanded on. It does not lessen the original Metal Box, which is a fantastic record of course."

> **"PiL was just the beginning of an adventure"**

That sense of appreciation of what he started with John Lydon, after the implosion of his former band the Sex Pistols, created a moment in time, a slew of creativity that the Public Image Ltd of today will never again harness. Although Jah was asked back into the fold again in 2009 by Lydon himself when he reformed PiL, disagreements surfaced with regard to money (wages) amongst other issues meant that Pil would remain a past adventure that still brings an amount of pride. "I feel with Metal Box we had done this record that I knew was very deep, very primal. It wasn't just some self-indulgent tripe, just creating some noises. It was truly a deep kind of thing, and John's (Lydon) lyrics by the way, I know he has become a Trump, fan of Brexit or whatever, but his words back then were Samuel Beckett. They were Samuel Beckett, they were deep, they were prose. There were just enough of them, and most of the album was instrumental, and it was a great record. But I thought we had done a great record, but I had never heard Miles (Davis), and I thought; "Fuck! Of course." There are people doing their own version, it is primal, not cliched, not bothering with the niceties of chord progressions or anything."

That brought us on to the bass player's own original influences that have impacted not just his playing but how he approaches music. "A lot of people in the music game in their fifties grew up with Britpop, or Brit Rock which is fine, and their first heroes were probably the Two Tone movement which is fine and lovely. For me it was the sound of Philly, Ska, but very first in my teens it was Black American Music. From Jazz and Funk I started coming across people like Lonnie Liston Smith, and they led me back to people like Pharaoh Sanders and others."

With all this talk of the past, the present and recent new music Jah Wobble has produced cannot be overlooked. Over

the past forty-plus years the creative flourishes he has produced are mind-blowing, however in this century alone they remain something spectacular. On Dark Luminosity - The 21st Century Collection (Cherry Red Records), Jah co-compiled and annotated a sixty-five-track set that spans music he made since the dawn of the millennium - effectively half of his career. But he remains a man who strives to challenge himself. “Yeah, I like to keep it interesting. It is a funny mixture of slowly, organically developing all the time, and moving as slow as a glacier with everything you do - you are just steadily, like rust never sleeps, you just keep going. It is an emanation of your highest power, or higher self, or buddha nature or whatever the fuck words you use. But on the other hand you do like to push yourself, push the limit to the point, especially live, where it might fall flat on its face. I like going to the circus but when I see the Russian or the Chinese circus, where you are watching these acrobats, and I am pretty sure they are not acting, this is on the edge of literally falling down, they are actually pushing it to the limit. It is that pushing it to the limit that has a fragility, the gaps between breaths and the gaps between thoughts. So I like to challenge myself, sometimes it is incredibly fast bass lines that are in 7/4 time. The challenge of completely surrendering to that pulse in order to play, you must not completely focus on it or think about it, you just play it with that funny sense of balance. I like it and I like things to stay interesting.”

The compilation effortlessly shows the scale of Wobble’s work, and how he manoeuvres himself through different forms and styles. Also, there are collaborations with such talent as Jule Campell, Temple Of Sound, and Marconi Union that create a variety of musical textures but also a cohesive format. In fact, if he wrote a CV it could well read; ‘Works well with others’, and that is an important point. “It reminds me of what they used to put on the cages of the staffies at Battersea Dogs Home; ‘Likes other dogs, prefers to live alone!’. I do get on with people, I like working with people. I find people interesting - people can be problematic as well, of course some people. We have to be very careful when dealing with drummers, I have drummers in the family, and drummers can be good to deal with but they can be awkward. Guitarists can be very awkward, and lead singers don’t even go there, they are borderline actors. I’m kinda being tongue in cheek now.”

Something important that many may be unaware of is Tuned In. This project created by Jah in 2019, shows another side to this artist, a motivation that is close to his heart and like all his projects it has become a hive of creativity based in the Merton Art Space, Wimbledon Library. “We had our very first public performance last Friday (May 19th), and it went very well, like a dream. I was very nervous, everybody was, because they are not professionals but the performances are professional like.” Expanding to explain what drove this seasoned musician to nerves, Jah continues. “I started it maybe five years or so ago. I started it up North and found it hard to get traction from my local council. I needed a bit of help so I asked my friend Anthony Hopkins (not that Anthony Hopkins) for advice. The idea was to do something about loneliness, because loneliness is the cause of so much unhappiness and I thought that would be a good route to go. I knew a lot of blokes, a lot of older blokes and some I had been in bands with, who were isolated and nutty - people I had known in the past. People I had known who were a bit isolated and maybe drinking

> **“The idea was to do something about loneliness”**

too much.” The further you delve, the more emotion fires from the voice of this artistic icon. “I felt I could set something up to help that was music based - more of a social club thing. The playing was a kind of an afterthought really. Anyway, it all worked very well, very quickly, and we ended up having older women come and younger people. So now we have all kinds of people, it is very inclusive across the spectrum. We have a jam night actually every fortnight, and lots of different groups have formed around the main group. So people get up and they have a repertoire to work on which is fantastic. There are beginner classes as well, to learn guitar and bass, we have some really good teachers that come, and we built a studio so we do recording sessions. And we do courses in audio engineering, so it has really mushroomed. Where we do it is Merton, which is a funny borough. The western part of Wimbledon in the evenings is fairly affluent, the eastern part is probably as poor as anywhere in London. Big estates which would be considered rough as fuck, of course I grew up on one of those estates so sometimes it is unfairly stigmatized. But we have people who have mental health issues come, and some people who are technically homeless, but all kinds of people and great players. And we have people from the western side of the borough that completely mix in. It is a very friendly club and everyone seems to get along and it is steadily growing. I found one of the best drummers I ever played with down there. I just sit there, I just like hanging out with everyone, I have a chat, I just find people very interesting.” ●

BLITZED SONGBOOK

POP MUZIK BY M

By Imogen Bebb

Pop Muzik' is one of those songs that, despite being made up of mostly nonsensical lyrics and hopelessly cheesy melodies, is extremely difficult to forget once you've heard it once.

This could be down to numerous things - the way the song's distinctive organ intro melts away so inconspicuously into that irresistible groove, perhaps. Maybe it's the 'shoo-be-do-be-do-wop' and 'bop-bop-shoo-wop' backing vocals that both amplify and underpin the track's glorious silliness. What about that refrain of 'New York, London, Paris, Munich / everybody talk about pop music'? It's so ludicrously memorable it's almost embedded in the UK's national consciousness at this point, with variations (the greatest of which has to be 'New York, London, Paris, Norwich') often found emblazoned across bags carried by 'arty' types who tend to sport large moustaches and Dr Martens.

If you saw the song performed on Top of the Pops back in 1979, another thing that might have struck you about 'Pop Muzik' was the appearance of its singer, a rather unassuming, plain-looking fellow in his early 30s who was dressed a little like a maths teacher and had the dance moves to match.

This 'fellow' was in fact Robin Scott, a Croydon-born singer-songwriter who had been involved in the music business since the late 1960s, performing as a folk musician and later undertaking multimedia projects with the BBC. After working as a producer, writing a musical, and even turning down an offer to run a punk clothing store (the now-notorious SEX) with his old art school pal Malcolm McLaren, in the late '70s whilst living in France Scott decided to put together a group of session musicians (including his brother Julian Scott, his wife Brigit Novik and a then-unknown Wally Badarou) and record an album under the name M.

A few months and eight tracks later the multitalented Scott had written, produced and recorded the entirety of M's debut album New York • London • Paris • Munich,

which featured an extended, five-minute version of 'Pop Muzik' as the opening track, along with the singles 'Moderne Man', 'Moonlight and Muzak' and 'That's the Way the Money Goes'. Scott had even managed to persuade a certain friend of his, David Bowie (who happened to be living in Montreal at the time), to join in with the album's recording process, contributing handclaps throughout.

Star turns aside, New York • London • Paris • Munich was met with overwhelmingly positive reviews upon its release in May 1979, whilst 'Pop Muzik' climbed the UK singles chart to number 2 where it remained for a fortnight (outdone only by Art Garfunkel's 'Bright Eyes' which was on its mammoth six-week run at number one) and later topped the charts in Australia, West Germany, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa and the US.

As for why 'Pop Muzik' was such a hit when it was released, one imagines it had something to do with the fact that it's a track which essentially extols the virtues of something everyone loves (or at the very least enjoys) on some level or another. As Scott himself explained to Fred Bronson in 1988:

"I was looking to make a fusion of various styles which somehow would summarise the last 25 years of pop music. It was a deliberate point I was trying to make. Whereas rock and roll had created a generation gap, disco was bringing people together on an enormous scale. That's why I really wanted to make a simple, bland statement, which was, 'All we're talking about basically [is] pop music."

It'll never catch on, folks. Those 'New York, London, Paris, Norwich' bags on the other hand? Now we're talking... ●

BIG COUNTRY INTERVIEW

TONY BUTLER IN CONVERSATION

by Kevin Burke

Big Country effortlessly dominated the eighties and nineties. "I was very lucky to be in such a great band," recounts bassist Tony Butler today. "I don't look back too much but when I do it is with great fondness for what we achieved. Because of the music we were making, we made the music that we wanted to make, and we were a band in the style and the fashion we wanted to be. We were not your run-of-the-mill Pop or Rock band. We just became very well known, and we were not Rock Stars or anything like that, and that's because most of what we were about was about being creative, it's that simple."

That is an enduring fact, in how Big Country was in essence relatable to the working classes. The band was formed in 1981 by former Skids' vocalist and guitarist Stuart Adamson along with guitarist Bruce Watson. However, a year later they recruited the permanent rhythm section in Tony and drummer Mark Brzezicki, and this formative lineup would last eighteen fruitful years. Throughout that career there were no pretentious motivations, and from a fans point of view they were not other worldly, they were four talented lads who could make addictive music together. "That is what we set out to do from the beginning really. Again, trawling my memory; when I first met Stuart Adamson, it was when myself and Mark were in a band called On The Air and we supported The Skids on their last tour with Stuart. I became quite friendly with Stuart on that tour, and realized what kind of a guy he was. He certainly was not; an outwardly going, I want to be a Rock Star, I want to be famous, I don't want to care about anything. He was a very studious guy, and serious about music, but he was very normal about life. It was the way I saw myself at the time anyway."

Continuing, and in some ways pointing at the chemistry of the four musicians, Tony examines the simple ethos of the band further. "People get involved in music for so many different reasons, and they are probably more about self promoting and self achieving then they are about a common goal. The one thing we had as a group was, we had a common goal. We were drawn in from the four corners of the kingdom, to become that band. It is kind of weird to have that all worked out."

Why Big Country is important in the scheme of music, is for their string of albums and singles that dominated the charts. Releases such as The Crossing, The Seer, and Steeltown (the latter hitting number one), and songs such as 'Look Away', 'Wonderland' and 'Fields Of Fire' quickly built a fanbase and created anthems for the everyday, an escapism that was not any fantastical journey. With a blending of Celtic Rock, New Wave and Post Punk sounds, Big Country provided something new to the charts, which indeed saw them support such acts as U2, Queen, David Bowie, The Rolling Stones and even The Jam on their farewell tour.

Regardless of all this success, there was one thing that also set Big Country apart from many of the bands of the day, and that was how little attention was ever given to the band in terms of scandals or coverage outside of the music they created. "I would hasten to add it was to our detriment not to play the Pop Star game. During the eighties and nineties, in order for record companies to sell records, they needed things to be as outlandish and avant-garde as possible to get publicity mileage. That is one thing they were never going to get from a band like Big Country. Yes, we did interviews, we did photo sessions like everyone else, but we did not do that Pop/Rock Star thing that took away from the importance of the band in terms of its music. Other people have really created their careers through everything but the music. The music is kind of secondary to their own sort of personalities and their ambitions. None of us in the band had any sort of personality or ambitions, we just loved being in that band. Everytime we would hit onto a stage, we loved being in that band - we had the best seats in the house, a fantastic feeling. But when we were off stage, it was never about cavorting in public, and trying to make idiots out of ourselves in order to get press - inches in papers and all that stuff. Which is what record companies really wanted and I think in the mid-career of the band record companies struggled with this in terms of the band. We just wanted to make great music, and they wanted us to recreate The Crossing and wear frilly clothes and have weird hairstyles."

> **"The one thing we had as a group was, we had a common goal"**

Big Country in their original incarnation lasted until the dawn of the 21st century. After eight albums from 1983 to 1999, the band started to wind down. The 'Final Fling' tour saw them play sold out shows in Glasgow, and indeed their final show in gig in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October of 2000. But what followed was tragedy with the loss of Stuart Adamson in December 2001. In many ways the last recording Big Country made and released in 1999, the ethereal and absorbing Driving To Damascus, remains a testament to the final days of the band. Of the music contained on the album, there is also an emotion looking back in that it would become the last time Stuart would write and record with his bandmates. "I remember thinking, when we were recording Driving To Damascus, where we were probably in terms of a band, we sort of went down the scale and sort of started to come up again. And we were all incredibly fused when we were recording Driving To Damascus. We felt that we were still producing new music in the style of the four of us, but things were improving with age."

"Stuart's lyrics on Driving To Damascus are phenomenal" Tony declares with an obvious pride. To be fair the collection of twelve tracks displays a range of styles and themes which use nuances of different genres, but together create something unique. "I think on 'Your Spirit To Me', it is one of the high points for me lyrically. But the actual title track 'Driving To Damascus' was the closest Big Country did, that made me fall completely and utterly in love with T. Rex again. It has

that feel to it, and I am a huge Marc Bolan and T. Rex fan, and when we did 'Driving To Damascus' it had such a T. Rex (Glam Rock) feel to it. I knew we were making music that people would like. We were so infused at the time of the recording."

It was a rejuvenated band that began to tackle the album, both the recording and writing. Something Tony looks back with a genuine fondness, and that feeling that the band was excited again is clearly evident. "It was nice to be in that position again. Like every band goes through the album doldrums, you put a lot of effort into writing songs that are not even received (well) and record companies are not putting as much as they could into it. You get into a music business trough, and sometimes it is really difficult to pull yourself out of it artistically, and not let it affect you personally. I think by the time we started recording Driving To Damascus, we had just come out of a bit of a low ebb I think. Even putting it together was a bit tough because we were going through different circumstances in life, and Stuart had just moved to Nashville, and we did a lot of writing in Nashville, which was not so good for me as I did not really enjoy the experience. But we managed to get a fantastic album out of it. Every band goes through hard times but Driving To Damascus is that light at the end of a very dark tunnel that we were in."

Not to be mistaken for hunger, or any need to create, the album marked a turning point in the band and how they approached their creativity. "There was always a creative hunger, because we were always creative and our creativity was measured more in the amount of material we rejected as opposed to actually used. We were very harsh on ourselves and we knew we had to conform in some way on the lines of commerciality, but we still wanted to make what would essentially be seen and recognised as a Big Country album. The band in its individual state, we combined to make such a great noise. I mean we could play twelve bar Blues and it would still sound like Big Country. We didn't play the same as everyone else, we were just unique as a band, and had a style. When we put the album together we also had the great addition to the team of producer Rafe McKenna. He came in as a real breath of fresh air in terms of just throwing everything into the mix and seeing what happens. It was a real fun time for us."

That sound and influence of Nashville found its way onto the album. Some tracks

> **"Every band goes through hard times but Driving To Damascus is that light at the end of a very dark tunnel"**

have an Americana flavour, but it is just a flavour as it is a thoroughly Big Country album. "It's like being a good cook. You can use essences of spices and herbs from all around the world, but if you cook with the same flame and approach, it should be identifiable, and that is what Big Country was like in terms of a musical cuisine." That said, there is still a sound reminiscent of their beginnings, that Celtic Rock sound which springs to life on songs such as 'Trouble The Waters', and that stretches into Rock and humour on the 'The President Slipped and Fell'. "I mean 'The President Slipped and Fell', people felt sometimes that we were a bit too serious, but there were times where we just like to turn the guitars up too loud and play them as loud as we could. And that is one of those tracks. But it makes sense and it has a bit of poetry to it, it has a great story to it and it has lots of Gibson Les Pauls on it."

Something not many know is how the Kinks' Ray Davies has songwriting credits on two of the album tracks - 'Somebody Else' and 'Devil In The Eye'. "That was a mutual thing. We were invited by Ray Davies to perform with him at Glastonbury in, I think 1997. From that he became interested in initially producing, and then he and Stuart got together, I believe, in New York and put some tracks together. For Stuart I imagine that must have been a fuckin' huge accolade. You do not get to be a British musician, whether it is England, Scotland or Wales and not know about somebody like Ray Davies. The man is just a living Rock and Roll legend. And the songs that they came up with, we did not play them like Ray Davies, we played them like Big Country would. We played them in our way, and the two songs they wrote together that appear on the album, it is Ray Davies but it is still about the band."

There is a genuine reason as to all this focus on that time and that album Driving To Damascus. Courtesy of Cherry Red Records, fans of Big Country now get a celebration of the album in a lavish four-disc box set (reviewed in this issue). The original twelve tracks are now expanded to a whopping seventy-two, which comprises demos, rarities and expanded notes on the process around the birth of this classic. "I know what you mean about going from twelve to seventy-two (tracks). I am slightly old fashioned, I mean I am sixty-six years old now, and there used to be a time when if you were in a band and did a demo, the only people that heard that demo were either the band or the record company, or the manager. But then came a time when people not only started to release demos, but people's recordings would appear on the internet. I remember being sent through an email, a clip of my bass playing on 'In A Big Country' solo. I thought; "Hang on! This is sacred, you should not be listening to this, this is something for our ears only". But it is all over the internet and nothing is sacred anymore. So why not put all that stuff in a collector's hands so that they can actually enjoy the finished product and the track being formulated, and different versions. Yeah so it is a great collector's piece, and I am not so rigid on my old-fashioned thoughts now."

One thing that is striking about this collection, is how Driving To Damascus could easily have been a double album given the amount of quality, unused songs. "We did record a lot of songs

around that period. We had demo sessions in England, demo sessions in Nashville, and everything took shape over a period of time. But we wanted to make sure, because of the slump in the nineties the band had in terms of albums and album sales, we wanted to make sure whatever we put out we could stand by in our normal way. Also, to give people a perspective of what the band was at that particular time (which the box set does). All records are a record of the band at the time, and everything was buzzing until the crap that befell us with the single 'Fragile Thing'."

As Tony mentions, a lot of the failure of Driving To Damascus becoming embraced by the buying public, and climbing the charts, can be placed on the lead CD single withdrawal of 'Fragile Thing' by the record company. The story goes that a limited-edition version of the single was withdrawn for having a packaging error (one cardboard fold too many) in accordance with the Chart regulator. In turn shops withdrew all editions of the single by mistake, hence a knock-on effect happened where the promotion of the album was concerned. "That killed practically everything. That whole thing, I mean we had tremendous hope for Driving To Damascus the first-time round. We were looking at doing as much touring as we can, going back to America, re-establishing ourselves out there, but because that single failed in such a disastrous way, it really blew the wind out of the Big Country sails unfortunately."

"We could play twelve bar Blues and it would still sound like Big Country"

Nevertheless, after the tragic passing of Stuart Adamson, Tony set about mastering a new edition of Driving To Damascus for the American market. Renamed John Wayne's Dream, this version arrived in 2002 and featured four extra tracks, two of which featured The Raphaels, a short-lived project formed by Stuart Adamson and Nashville musician Marcus Hummon. "Because of 'Fragile Thing' the album did not do what it should have done. The single did not chart, and I would not say our heads went down, but I know for certain Stuart's head went down for certain. It is not about struggling, it is the want to keep achieving, which is a human response to a situation like that. But there was no way for us to climb out of that hole we fell into, it was seriously bad. When we went back to look at John Wayne's Dream, it was because 'Yes!' Driving To Damascus could have been a double album, and there was a lot of material that did not fit, and the record company was certainly not going to let us release a double album at that time. But the pressure definitely dropped after 'Fragile Thing' stopped."

The thankful thing about this upcoming box set is how all these songs are together under one musical roof. Songs people may not be familiar with and may not have heard before such as the John Wayne's Dream bonus material. Further, and more importantly, the set fondly shows how the dynamic of Big Country still was as powerful as ever. "Anyone that invests in it, not only gets to hear the music in all shapes and forms, but they also get an idea of where the band was - where we were as people as well as musicians. We stoked the fire, we did not reinvent ourselves or any of that crap, we just re-stoked the fire, and the embers needed pushing on a bit. And we were in really good shape. But yes this box set, when I was told Cherry Red Records were going to put it out, it kinda made me feel that the story can be told. Not through interviews or comments, but through the music end of it."

That aside, Driving To Damascus is an album that the band were incredibly proud of then, and that emotion still remains, and rightly so. "Absolutely! It can be too much of that Rock and Roll legend when every band says their latest album is their best album. For us it was because we had been through a couple of albums, and we didn't want to let ourselves down and not put out a good album, but we were just a little more intense for Driving To Damascus to put the band back where it should be. Not in the public mind, but in the band's own minds. I am not one for re-releases, but this time I would love to see that people will get a concept of where the band was, how happy the band was, if anything the happiness inside of Stuart on that record."

Big Country: Driving To Damascus, 4CD Deluxe Edition is released 30 June 2023 via Cherry Red

MAKING TIME COOL
THE SWATCH WATCH

By Mik Scarlet

Time lights a cigarette as the song goes, making time super cool, but what did a cool time piece look like? One answer that took the feel or pop art and smashed it into the watch industry.

Born out of business shenanigans in the watch industry too boring to include here, the Swatch Watch originally called The Popularis began taking shape in 1981. The brainchild of Dr. Nicolas G. Hayek, a leading watch expert, the Swatch was an attempt to attract entry level buyers away from watch giant Seiko while pushing the boundaries of what is available and possible in the market at that time. The designer, Ernst Thomke, alongside Elmar Mock, and Jacques Müller created the Swatch using the latest Quartz technology, to fit the under 50 Swiss Francs price bracket. This led to the thinness and the use of plastic, so the key style elements of the Swatch came from a drive to cut costs.

The Swatch name comes from Second Watch, and so it was born in Switzerland before being launched to the world on March 1st, 1983. What happened next was far from expected, as the Swatch moved from second timepiece to essential fashion item. By 1985 the Los Angeles Times named the Swatch "the hottest new fashion accessory on the market". The same year, the Swatch Art Special Edition was released with designs from artists and famous creatives such as Kiki Picasso, Alfred Hofkunst, Keith Haring, Vivienne Westwood, and Damien Hirst. The Picasso Swatch ended up being worth $25000-$40000 in 1998. Eeek.

Still available, still ubiquitous, still market leaders, the Swatch was a game changer. In one swoop the Swatch made watches cool and fashionable, within reach of everyone and a fashion essential. It signposted the future of technology, combining look with function and also the collector market, developing a Swatch for all occasions and styles. Much of today's consumer technology market owes a debt to the thinking behind the Swatch.

I say this, but I can also say proudly that I have never owned one and never will. Not my thing at all.

SAFARI ADVENTURES
AIR INTERVIEW

by Kevin Burke

For many of us, the album Moon Safari shaped and signalled the mood of the final days of the last century. A game-changing release that gave rise to a slower, downbeat style of electronic music. It was both exciting and uplifting, and along with the singles 'Sexy Boy', 'All I Need' and 'Kelly Watch The Stars', the album quickly produced radio staples that dominated airwaves. Alongside this, Moon Safari also made overnight stars of the creative force behind it. That being the French duo of Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel who together formed the band Air. It is a slice of history in how they stole the show unexpectedly from the guitar bands of the nineties. Going back to the start, Air was formed in 1995 by an architecture student (Godin) and a mathematics student (Dunckel), both of those qualities are nuances immersed into their methods and sound. The duo recorded their first Ep Premiers Symptômes shortly after, and it was not too long before they began the task of piecing together what would become their debut. It is quite extraordinary as we celebrate the twenty-five years since it was released, how fresh and how that contact-high of positivity is still prominent within the textures of the release. To further celebrate the occasion, Moon Safari is now reissued on 180g 'Sea Of Tranquillity' coloured vinyl, and the absorbed electronic sound breathes freely on a turntable. Looking back to when the album was recorded, nobody knew or even considered how the long-lasting appeal of Moon Safari would still be so relevant today, not even the band themselves. "Not at all!" says Jean-Benoît today and continues; "I remember at the time I was hopeful, but I did not expect it. I felt the album was really sincere and really emotional, but weird in a way because at that time there was a lot of House music on the radio, and we did something different." Expanding on that description, the passion for the album still brings a nostalgic joy to the composer; "We did something slower, more mellow and more emotional and eclectic. So for me this album could not have had a successful way, but it did actually, and I am really happy about that."

Part of the charm woven within the fabric of Moon Safari is how it adapted to the mainstream scene. Going further it is worth exploring how the release managed to cross over genres. This can be shown in how the same music fans who were buying Radiohead and Oasis albums, were also the ones who found the same appeal in an electronic album, and that is a rarity. "It is interesting." Pausing for a moment to reminisce; "In a way we arrived at a time when there was a little bit of change in England, certainly music-wise. Because with some of those bands, it was really the beginning of the end of those Britpop bands. It was sort of a wave ending, and we arrived with something fresh and new from France, and after that there has been a lot of electronic music showing up in England. After that again, in two thousand, English Rock went back into the fashion and all these American Hip hop bands came and took over all the success. But maybe because it was the end of a certain Britpop wave, that they started paying attention to other bands like Air. I do not know?"

> **"I felt the album was really sincere and really emotional"**

There is certainly a relaxed, calming element for many that is found in the album. Better said, it can be viewed as the perfect 'Sunday morning' record to immerse yourself in after the night before. Moon Safari exists outside of clubs, both then and now, and so adds to the personal experience. Nowadays, we take that approach for granted, whilst back then by the industry it was viewed as a fearless move. "Yes. It is a chill out album. There is something really, really soft and very emotional in the music. That is, in how it is very child-like in a way. There is something in how it speaks to the children inside ourselves, and there is this kind of vibration that is something really easy going and something that is really soft and tender, something emotional and melancholic also."

The aforementioned student of mathematics Jean-Benoît, used elements with his scientific background within the invention of Air. Seen last year on his solo album Carbon and understanding his belief system gives more insight to what anchors his creativity. Though it was once stated that the band name Air is an acronym for Amour, Imagination, Rêve or rather Love, Imagination, Dream. "Ah yes, we came up with that formula to please a journalist at the time (laughs). We did not think like that, we were just recording and that is it." Before expanding on how science and music merge. "In a way, yes. I use science to find feelings, because music is the uplifting feelings inside us. I am passionate about nature, and science can reveal nature - science can explain to you about how nature is formed. It is my religion because I do not believe in God, as I believe in nature. Even in the Bible, you can replace the word 'God' with 'Nature' and it works too because actually the mystery of God is actually the mystery of nature. Also, a little in the Moon Safari vibrations there is this kind of space admiration, and this fact in how we are trapped in this time and space, and that we are floating in space and we should think about that more because nothing really matters. What happens on Earth does not really matter because we are so small and our life does not have any real importance at all. So, in this music there is this feeling of meditation and also this feeling of floating in space while on Earth, and the fact that we have to just enjoy the time and enjoy these vibrations."

The album had some impact in Air's home country of France where it reached a high of 21 on the charts and sold a respectable 100,000 copies. On the other hand, in the UK Moon Safari sold six times that, and reached a high of number six on the charts. Another point it still ended up in the UK's top two hundred for the end of year 2001 and 2002 charts. It seems it did not live up to the artist's expectations at home. "No (laughs). It worked in France and we had a lot of fans, but the French do not like searching for this music at all. What is popular in France is Hip Hop and the French language songs, and there is no French language, except on 'Sexy Boy'." American vocalist Beth Hirsch appears on two album tracks, continuing; "There is

no French singing at all on this album. It did quite well but it disappeared very fast on the charts. But it was later on with The Virgin Suicides and with 10 000 Hz Legend, that the French press really enjoyed our music and really understood that we were a really big band, a big international band all over the world. They had a lot of respect for that."

With the almost overnight global success of Moon Safari, came an equal amount of focus on Air and what their next musical move would be. The first was the mesmerising soundtrack to the Sofia Coppola movie The Virgin Suicides which arrived a year later. After that came that aforementioned follow up proper to Moon Safari with 10 000 Hz Legend. What you do have to admire is how neither Jean-Benoît or Nicholas were tempted to simply release a soundalike follow up to Moon Safari, and instead took to exploring other artistic avenues. "It was a very difficult process, because we did not want to do Moon Safar 2. We wanted to make a surprise, and I had seen in the English music press, and I saw a little in France too, that we were doing some kind of easy listening music, you know some kind of elevator music - something like light music. So, we wanted to prove that we were able to do something big sounding, something important, something massive, and that is why we did 10 000 Hz Legend. It did not work so well in England, because it was so very different, and the English media said that it was a lot more Prog Rock. That aside we had done The Virgin Suicides after Moon Safari and that had brought a lot of success in France and Europe. Now when I look back at this album, it is so important to Air,"

Continuing on the theme of not going the straightforward route of repeating the same style of album again. An incredibly brave attitude surfaced the more Jean-Benoît elaborates about how he views his art. "We always wanted to do art actually. To go and record some kind of universal Beat music, and we were not interested by the media reaction so much. We knew that we had the chance to be heard in the world, so we had to pull and to do something really important, something deep that could stay for a long time. Because we knew that the hype and the fashion around Air could end quite easily, because this is kind of like the low for the bands. When you go high, and everybody is listening to you, you can disappear quite fast too, because you cannot stay at this level for a long time."

Nevertheless, the influence of Moon Safari is still felt today. A prime example comes from the most unlikely source of the Washington Indie giants Death Cab For Cutie. Their keyboardist and guitarist Dave Depper recreated the album in the studio and released it as a solo project in 2021. Again, reiterating the importance of the album. "Yes, but you know the strange thing is that everybody in France, certainly everybody in the press is speaking about the famous 'French Touch', that is what they say." French Touch describes the House Music and Tekfunk that originated in the country during the nineties. "The French do not put Air into this because it is not electro. In a way the media want to reward the bands that are still listened to by young people nowadays in France. Their vision is that Daft Punk and Cassius are still heard by young people but they do not put Air into this kind of group of artists because they do not have any vision. It is just like an auto congratulatory movement by the media of the French music (scene). When I travelled this time (recently), I just realized how different French music is from abroad than from France. When you go to Minneapolis in America and if you go to the famous radio in Minneapolis, and it is important to have a lot of musical culture, they know a lot about World music but they do not know a lot about French music actually, and their vision of French music is very different from what the French think. I say that because I know that as an artist, you are never recognised in your own country."

> "We knew that the hype and the fashion around Air could end quite easily"

Finally, Jean-Benoît discussed how, back in February 1998, that it seemed so distant as the world moved digitally, that we would see Moon Safari return in an old-school format - a retro style for a futuristic sound. "No, I was not sure vinyl would still exist (laughs). It is a really good reissue, the vinyl is really thick and the matting is well done, and all the papers are good quality, and it is great to do that." After all, the man does understand quality and Moon Safari still testifies to that. ●

AIR AND THE VERSAILLES CONNECTION

By Martin James

Back in the 1990s Martin James was one of the first UK journalists to write about the music emerging from Paris. He was also the first person to interview Air. In fact, his connection to the city ran so deep that he gave the scene the name it became known as - French Touch. Here he shares an extract from his book French Connections: From Discotheque to Daft Punk – The Birth of French Touch which details a meeting with Nicholas Godin and Jean-Benoit Dunckel in their Versailles studio.

BACK IN THE MID 1980'S, as many of France's dance movers and shakers were soaking up the US electro funk sounds crackling over the radio and the Kervorkian remixes appearing on import at record stores two bands were doing their best to keep their own versions of the rock flag flying. Their names were Orange and Louba. Orange played music that was reminiscent of David Bowie in his Berlin and Scary Monsters periods. Louba on the other hand attempted to create their version of The Violent Femmes. Both bands played gigs with each other in their native Versailles. Neither looked likely to set the world alight. Except the ranks of both bands featured people who would quite literally rewrite the dance and electronic music rule books in their own inimitable ways.

Orange comprised of Nicholas Godin and Jean-Benoit Dunckel, Alex Latrobe and Xavier Jameaux. Louba on the other hand was made up of the trio of Etienne de Crecy, Pierre-Michel Levallois and Mr. Learn.

When the turn of the 90s saw these bands collapse from a lack interest from anyone but their own friends the various members would go on to play their own significant part in the growth of the Paris scene, under the alias' of, among others, Air, Super Discount, Bang Bang and of course Alex Gopher. Their stories would be intertwined with bands like Cosmo Vitelli, Mellow and Motorbass while their presence would occasionally seem to be as powerful as a secret lodge. This was the Versailles connection, where the old school tie network ran as deeply as the region's aristocratic roots.

Versailles. A haven on the edge of Paris. A place where green lawns roll like fog, golf courses stretch like cats in a carpet show room and areas of forestation loom large and inviting. It's a suburb of endless summers, where the world outside seems distant, and the chaos of life is someone else's problem. From here it is easy to forget Paris' appalling racial divide which has produced the worst no-go ghettos outside of New York. From here you can easily forget striking lorry drivers and the mid-summer smell of the city centre. This is the place that time forgot; a little bit of France as the rest of the world imagines it to be stuck between the future and the past.

It was in that heat hazed, green belt paradise that I met the duo of Jean-Benoit Dunckel and Nicholas Godin in 1999 for what was our sixth interview since I wrote the first piece about them a few years earlier. Nicholas and J-B created music which pulled at our very preconceptions of Frenchness. If fellow Parisian Dimitri from Paris created his image from Peter Sellers parody of the Parisian Inspector Clouseau, then Air draw on the apparently mythological Paris as learned from textbooks, imagined via pen pals or romanticised through foreign exchanges.

Air - an acronym of Amour, Imagination, Rêve, (Love,

Imagination, Dream) explored the melancholy that seeped into the very heart of the country's sixties pop sound while also tugging at the freeform sci-fi phonics of avant-garde opera. They placed Serge Gainsbourg happily next to Jean Jacques Perrey in an exercise of future retro melodrama. It was a sound obsessed with aristocracy. Albeit the aristocracy of pop. Theirs was a music that also echoed the multi-hued moodiness of the kind of French cinema so beloved of British students. Films like Betty Blue, Subway and Diva found their beauty, passion and despair somehow transposed into Air's grooves. Like Versailles itself Air were the epitome of France through rose coloured spectacles.

Air's studio was an old, converted barn, hidden among lush greenery. To one side of it a golf course, to the other woodland. On the day of our interview the air was filled with 'clomp' of golf club on ball and a constant shrill of bird whistle. Beyond that nothing. No traffic hum and no crackling electricity pylons, just the sound, as Simon and Garfunkle might have said, of silence.

Nicholas and J-B emerged from their studio to greet me. They were every inch the congenial hosts with warm smiles, handshakes and welcoming comments. Just as their music evoked the France of the schoolroom so too their demeanour was almost laughably foreign exchange student. Both dressed in college geek chic (slacks and tucked in shirts). Nicholas, the taller of the two, sported a huge wave of Princess Dianna-esque hair while J-B opted for the grown-out French-crop. Both were skinny with catalogue model looks.

It was by then a full year since the release of their seminal Moon Safari album and four years since the debut single 'Modular Mix'. Over the three years since we first met we'd developed a kind of friendship defined by their release schedule. This time we'd come together to discuss the imminent re-release of their long-lost

album Premiers Symptomes, a collection of their first three EPs, which originally surfaced in late '97, but swiftly disappeared again.

It's a strange situation for Nicholas and J-B. With no new material they felt like they had nothing fresh to say.

"The idea is for people to discover what we were doing before Moon Safari. We don't feel comfortable with this old stuff being released. The originals are very rare now, so we decided to reissue it for the newer fans. But we'd rather have new stuff," said Nicholas.

There was of course the subject of the soundtrack they've provided for Sophia Coppolla's Virgin Suicides movie. However, it wasn't due for release until the following January, so it was off the agenda. At that moment in time the duo seemed strangely stuck between the future and the past. Just like their music in fact. And Versailles of course.

"We grew up about a mile away from here," explained Nicholas as we settled into the studio for the interview. "It's the best part of Paris, a lot of forest. It was a great place to grow up in except it was very boring but then I think everyone says that about where they lived. It's because your home is where you know everywhere and understand the rules."

"The thing is this is a very boring place to live so artists will inevitable rebel against it," continued J-B. "It's also a very intolerant place. It's a very Catholic area which isn't very cool because they judge people by strict moral standards."

"Versailles is very strict catholic place which can seem right wing," added Nicholas. "If you look at the election, the south of France has more fascists than here. In the south there's maybe thirty or forty members of parliament that are fascist. Here maybe only ten."

Only ten fascists! Is this why Nicholas escaped to art school to train as an architect I wondered?

"No," he laughed. "I was drawn to architecture because they had the best parties. If you know the big art schools in France, it's them who give the best parties. A lot of alcohol and girls. A lot of sex."

Somehow sex and alcohol were not the motivating factors that you'd expect to find at the heart of Air's psyche. The elegiac qualities of their music had created an almost sexless image for the duo. Sure, they evoked the spirit of sex gods and goddesses (Serge Gainsbourg, Beatrice Dalle) but theirs would seem to have been an almost transcendental sexuality. Not for these clean-living boys the sweaty bump and grind of skin against skin. They were more Woody Allen's Orgasmatron.

"Air are human beings after all," protested Nicholas. "We love to get drunk; we enjoy sex like anyone else. We have a very common everyday life except that we actually do something we like for a living. I don't agree that our music isn't physical. Moon Safari is a bed album. 'Sexy Boy' is a very dirty song I think. We like to think of our music as soundtracks for sex. Music to us is an extremely sensuous thing and naturally sex is a part of this sensuality. We'd love to do the music for a sex film or maybe a sex CD-ROM."

Air hadn't always been the space lounge duo of Moon Safari. Back in the days immediately after the break-up of Orange it was Nicholas Godin who first emerged working as Air. Initially he teamed up with fellow member of Orange, Alex Gopher. They recorded the first Air demos with a full band drawn from the ranks of George Clinton's Parliament and Funkadelic. Although it's hard to imagine the mellow moods of Godin's Air output with a P-Funk undertow, it is worth remembering that the Versailles musician

counts funk as one of his musical loves. At this stage it wasn't inconceivable that Godin would have embarked on a path which took him in the direction of this music.

"Nicholas had a few ideas that he'd been working on," said Alex Gopher of his friend. "But he wasn't so good in the studio at this time. So Etienne helped him to produce a track."

The resulting Modular Mix was, as I described in a review for Melody Maker, 'a collision between mellow Moogs, downtempo electronica and the easy listening ambience of Serge Gainsbourg'. It was released as single along with a rough-cut house remix by Etienne under the Motorbass moniker in November 1995.

In his search for a musical partner during the period Godin also worked for a short while with fellow architecture student, Patrick Woodcock (who later become a part of Mellow). Together the temporary duo penned the tune 'Ce Matin La' which would eventually turn up on Air's debut album, Moon Safari.

Soon after 'Modular Mix' Godin started work on his follow up single, 'Casanova 70', without Etienne's support. Despite using Etienne's friend from Studio Plus XXX, Stephane Briat (who also worked with Dimitri from Paris on his second album) the experience of writing and producing on his own proved to me far more frustrating than he had imagined. Godin subsequently asked his old band mate from Orange, Jean-Benoit Dunckel to become a member of Air.

"Just after writing 'Casanova 70' Nicholas went to see his old friend from Orange, Jean Benoit," recalled Marc Tessier du Cros who managed Air's label Record Makers in 2002. "At this time he was a maths teacher, who played piano in his spare time. Nicholas went to see one of JB's shows in a piano bar and after the show he went up and explained that he was launching the band and wanted JB to be a part of it. It was a big risk for Jean Benoit though, because he already had a child. But he agreed and signed to Source as well."

Jean-Benoit's path to Air hadn't been entirely devoid of musical pursuit. Apart from his gigs as a piano player in a bar, he had also recorded demos with Stephane Luginbuhl who would later form Olano and then Mellow. These demos combined psychedelic pop with house beats, but the duo didn't carry on with the venture due

of Air's studio; the soundtrack to Close Encounters of a Third Kind - a space adventure that was presented as a Blockbuster with a sense of childlike wonder or excitement. Since then such topics have taken on either the Year 2000 conspiracy theory where the US always wins out, or the Cold War continuum of the US victorious against all dark forces with Russia replaced by aliens.

Back in 1999 Versailles, as we set off for a walk into the woodlands for the photo shoot, heat haze shimmering across the golf course, another side to the duo's history emerged. This idyllic home in Versailles wasn't always Air's chosen base. Indeed all of the tracks on the Premieres Symptomes album were recorded in the chaos and confusion of Paris. Previously they'd owned a studio on a cobbled street just below the Montmartre. A picture postcard of street with a windmill (and at that time a Domino Pizza shop) at one end, it seemed to be a pretty unremarkable tourist attraction. Except it was in this street that both Air and Daft Punk were hatching their plans for world domination. Surprisingly however, it was Air who upset the neighbours.

"The people in the street where we were found my phone number one day and they kept on phoning me whenever we were in the studio," Nicholas said with a broad grin. "Every time the music started we'd be interrupted. We were just down the road from Daft Punk, You'd think that people would get upset with them because it's house music. But they don't disturb anybody. And with us, making this sweet music, cool guys making sweet music and there's so much noise. The windows were like this (shakes hands)."

"When we played the organ it would vibrate everything," J-B continued. "We like the live sounds, so we have to turn it up loud."

"Sometimes you know, the guys who do thrash rock are very calm, but guys like us are the opposite," Nicholas added with a smile. "Guys like Jimi Hendrix, you know, they were making this music out on the edge but in private they were very sweet guys. For us it's the opposite. I can get in a bad mood and break everything in the studio. We only do this music to calm down our nerves. We like pure songs. In fact I'd like to collaborate with Jesus… Or God!"

"There's music that people can still listen years later, and it still sounds fresh," continued Nicholas. "Then there's stuff that tries to be up to the minute that sounds old a month later. We're trying to be like the first type of music. It's not about being retro, it's classic. In the future Air will be simply seen as music from the twentieth century, nothing more."

"There is an argument that the twentieth century didn't actually start until the First World War," J-B concluded. "Now we're all waiting for the big event that kicks off the twenty-first century. Maybe it will be one of our albums."

to Dunckel's workload as a teacher.

The first track that featured Air as solid duo came with 'Les Professionals', the B-side of 'Casanova 70'. Once again Etienne was in the producers seat. And the difference was immediately noticeable. Where Godin's track had flowed around retro ideas, the combined forces of Godin, Dunckel and de Crecy found classic easy listening melodies fused with minimalist synths, film-esque ambience and modern production. This was to be the last Air recording that featured input from Etienne de Crecy.

The single that fully defined Air as a duo came in July 1997. 'J'Ai Dormi Sous L'Eau' c/w 'Le Soleil et Pres de Moi' offered a combination of the space pop Moogs of Jean Jacques Perrey, walking bass lines, whooshing synths and echo on overdrive. Melodies were a pure French pop melodrama, while vocals were heavily vocodered in what was to become the trademark Air touch.

"We wanted 'Moon Safari' to be an adventure which took the French sound somewhere different. For us the moon is the perfect symbol for our music," said Nicholas. "It represents something that has been here for eternity and in the future everyone will want to go to the moon. The music that we do is very respectful of the past but it's there to take you on an adventure into the future. So this mix between old and new id really representative of our music. Which is why we used the moon image. When we say 'Moon Safari' it is a logical way of saying that there is life on the moon. Which we believe there must be because we grew up believing in sci fi."

"When I was a kid I thought that in the year 2000 we would be all in spaceships with laser guns everywhere," continued Nicholas. "I'm disappointed that hasn't happened yet. I love the idea of aliens and spaceships."

As if to underline the point only one record sat on the floor

Extract taken from: French Connections: From Discotheque to Daft Punk – The Birth of French Touch by Martin James. Available now on Velocity Press.

BLITZED ARTEFACT

NIGHTCLUBBING BY GRACE JONES

by Imogen Bebb

In the autumn of 1980, Grace Jones - model, actor, singer and occasional songwriter - found herself in a pretty good position with regards to her music career. A few months previously she'd released her fourth album Warm Leatherette which had marked a distinct change in style for the singer, moving away from the slightly old-fashioned, overblown disco sound of her earlier releases and instead embracing the genre-bending possibilities offered by the new wave movement. As a result, Warm Leatherette became Jones's breakthrough record in the UK; it was met with positive reviews from critics and relatively high sales in the US and Australia too.

But there was still more success to come.

Soon Jones set about recording her fifth album Nightclubbing, the creation of which was in many ways similar to that of Warm Leatherette - both albums were recorded at Compass Point studios in the Bahamas, both featured Jamaican session musicians and producers Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare (better known as simply 'Sly and Robbie') at the heart of the studio band's rhythm section, and both saw Jones actively looking to combine a variety of genres including dub, funk, reggae and art-pop into a brand of new wave that could only be recognisable as her own. On its release in May 1981 Nightclubbing subsequently became Jones's highest-selling album until that point, reaching the top 10 in numerous European countries and receiving the prestigious title of 'Album of the Year' from UK music magazine NME.

Another notable similarity between Warm Leatherette and Nightclubbing was their use of striking sleeve artwork created by Jones's then-partner, the French designer Jean-Paul Goude. He sought to represent Jones's newly intensified image (devised in accordance with her fresh musical direction) in all its uncompromising glory by using angular lines, surreal tones and perceptively highlighting her androgyny, and in doing so made the singer one of the most recognisable pop culture icons of the 20th century.

The image of Jones created by Goude for the cover of Nightclubbing was particularly striking; a painted photograph showing the singer dressed in a man's wide shouldered Armani suit with a cigarette dangling from her lip and her signature flattop haircut in situ, the image simultaneously presents a sense of threat and beauty, something that had arguably never been portrayed on an album cover before in such an arresting and artistic way.

The mannequin-like features, the cool, unsettling gaze, the subtle shades of blue - it all came together to form the image of an artist who was trying to forge a new way forward in music, but on her own terms.

"I wanted the audience to be intimidated by this person, who wasn't doing things like anyone else" Goude said, speaking to The Guardian about the image in 2018. "It went beyond just a haircut, it was an attitude. It was new and strong and ambiguous. You didn't know if it was a man trying to be a girl or a girl trying to be a man. It was a revolution".

Goude continued to create artwork for Jones's releases until 1985 when the pair split up, with other notable collaborations including the covers of studio albums Living My Life (1982) and Slave To The Rhythm (1985), and the compilation album Island Life (1985).

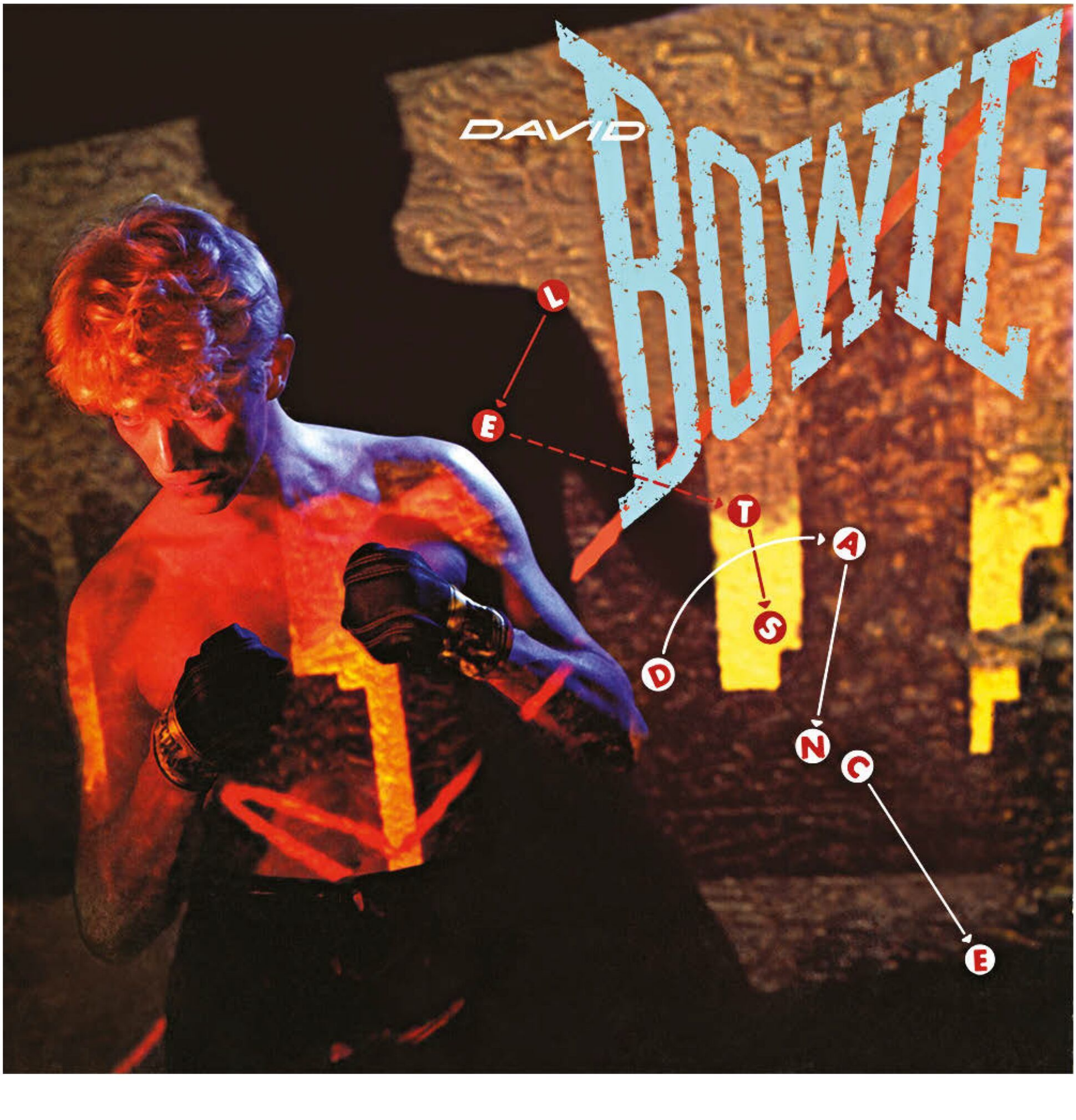
However, although these are indeed iconic images that show a different side to Jones, one could easily argue that none of them sufficiently showcase her imposing beauty and nonconformist attitude quite like the image that adorns the cover of Nightclubbing. ●

SERIOUS MOONLIGHT

DAVID BOWIE - LET'S DANCE

40TH ANNIVERSARY

By Paul Browne



Despite being reinvigorated by his 1980 album Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps), David Bowie's musical journey seemed to slow down over the next few years. In part, this was due to a growing dissatisfaction with his record label, RCA. At the same time, he was awaiting the expiry of a severance agreement with former manager Tony Defries (which by September 1982 would see Bowie gain full rights to any new songs).

Bowie actually spent 1982 firstly on a break in the South Pacific to bide his time, but also taking time out from this sabbatical to return to acting. This included war drama Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence and erotic horror The Hunger, which were both later released in 1983.

Now suitably refreshed, Bowie could turn his focus back on music. Keen to make a fresh start, Nile Rodgers of the band Chic was recruited to co-produce the next record. Rodgers came onboard with an impressive resume as Chic had chalked up phenomenal hit records, including 'Le Freak' and 'Good Times'. But his production talents also encompassed acts such as Sister Sledge and Diana Ross. Rodgers would also later expand his CV by working with Duran Duran, Madonna, Lady Gaga and Daft Punk.

The fledgling ideas for what would become the Let's Dance album saw Bowie drawing on a number of rhythm & blues influences. Learning that Rodgers shared a love of the same artists encouraged Bowie that Rodgers was the smart choice. "I guess that triggered me off thinking it might be fun working with him", Bowie later commented.

Despite his enthusiasm, Bowie was also well aware that he had to deliver a commercial hit with the new album. It can't have been easy getting back into the groove after the gap of two years since Scary Monsters. Initially, Rodgers flew out to Montreux where Bowie ran through some rough demos on guitar. From there, Rodgers could conjure up ideas on how to whip the songs into shape.

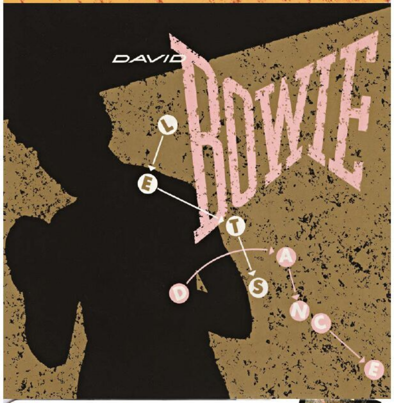
In December 1982, the album sessions took place at the Power Station in New York City. Outside of taking on the talents of Nile Rodgers, Bowie was also keen to involve new musicians. "I wanted to try people that I'd never worked with before, so that I couldn't predict how they were going to play" was how Bowie summed up this approach. This included Texas blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan as well as a selection of musicians chosen by Rodgers. Chic session musicians Rob Sabino and Sammy Figueroa were brought in as well as drummer Omar Hakim from Weather Report and bassist Carmine Rojas, who had also performed for Stevie Wonder.

For the first time ever, Bowie only sang and played no instruments. "I felt I was becoming a little static with the kind of synthesiser-techno stuff I'd been doing" Bowie said at the time. "I wanted to break away from that. Every few years I have to redefine what I'm writing." The sessions also moved at speed, which was typical of the way that Bowie often worked. Almost everything was done in one take and Bowie knocked out his vocals for the album in just two days. Stevie Ray Vaughan's involvement drew particular praise from Bowie, who was impressed with the guitarist's ability to "...become a midwife to a sound that I had ringing in my ears all year."

During the post-production of Let's Dance, Bowie also signed to EMI America, which freed him from the burden of being with RCA and also served another fresh start in tandem with the album.

Musically, Let's Dance managed to present a perfect combination of dance-pop and rock with funk flourishes that slotted perfectly into the colourful music scene of 1983. The title song (and lead single) had a brash and brassy delivery that couldn't fail to be a hit. Equally, Stevie Ray Vaughan's guitar solo gives the composition some extra weight.

When 'Let's Dance' was released as a single in March 1983, it was also accompanied by a memorable video that Bowie had shot in Australia with frequent video collaborator David Mallet. Featuring two students from Sydney's Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, the video offered up commentary on culture and capitalism. Meanwhile, Bowie himself only appears



performing as part of a bar band.

'Let's Dance' knocked off Duran Duran's 'Is There Something I Should Know?' from the top of the charts, securing a No.1 position in the UK. The single was also a massive international hit.

The parent album arrived in April, featuring an intriguing series of choices in its track listing. This includes a slick cover of Iggy Pop's 'China Girl', which the pair had recorded together for Pop's 1977 album The Idiot. Let's Dance also featured a reworking of 'Cat People (Putting Out Fire)', originally recorded by Bowie and Giorgio Moroder in 1982 for the film of the same name. Although a spirited effort (with Stevie Ray Vaughan adding in some guitar fills), arguably the new take on 'Cat People' can't quite match the dynamism and power of the original.

Meanwhile, the slick pop of 'Modern Love', which opens the album, offers an exuberant slice of power pop with energetic horns and soul touches. Bowie later commented that the song's call-and-response elements were a nod to Little Richard. The third single release from the album, it reached No. 2 in the UK charts and was only kept off the No. 1 slot by Culture Club's smash hit 'Karma Chameleon'.

The video for 'Modern Love' opted for a much more conventional band performance shot on Bowie's Serious Moonlight tour. The song became a staple for ending live shows as it allowed Bowie to "wave bye-bye" to the crowd as suggested by the lyrics. Later, to promote the Glass Spider tour, Bowie re-recorded the song with Tina Turner as part of a 1987 Pepsi commercial in which Bowie plays the role of a scientist who "creates" Turner in his laboratory.

'China Girl' showcases Bowie's ability to craft memorable pop hooks while exploring themes of cultural identity and desire. The song's sultry guitar riffs and Bowie's passionate vocals added to its allure. At the same time, the album also serves up introspective moments, such as 'Without You' and 'Criminal World', where Bowie's distinctive voice brings emotional depth to its lyrical narrative.

Also released as a further single from the album, the video for 'China Doll' had run into controversy. With footage of naked figures rolling around in the surf (a reference to the film From Here to Eternity), the video was banned from New Zealand and some other countries at the time. Despite this, the single release managed a respectable No. 2 position in the UK charts.

Visually, the Let's Dance album also boasted a striking, bold cover. Bowie is photographed by Greg Gorman in boxer's pose against a stylised city skyline. Elsewhere, Derek Boshier's artwork adopts the simple streetwise style of Keith Haring while Mick Haggerty's design touches lends the album a rough, earthy quality.

On release, Let's Dance received almost unanimous praise from critics. In Time magazine, the album was described as "unabashedly commercial, melodically alliterative and lyrically smart at the same time". Charles Shaar Murray, writing for the NME, called it "some of the strongest, simplest and least complicated music that Bowie has ever made." The album managed to reach No. 1 in the UK charts, while also achieving similar success internationally.

Bowie himself later summed the album up as "a rediscovery of white-English-ex-art-school-student-meets-black-American-funk, a refocusing of Young Americans" (Bowie's 1975 album which trod similar ground).

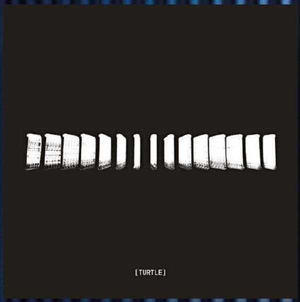
There's perhaps an argument to be had that despite the appeal of Let's Dance, there's a sense that Bowie was eschewing his experimental side in favour of music that had its edges smoothed down. But the album also demonstrated his uncanny ability to reinvent himself and adapt to an ever-evolving music landscape. Its commercial success also solidified Bowie's status as a pop icon. The album's infectious hooks, danceable rhythms and Bowie's magnetic presence continue to resonate with audiences, making Let's Dance a significant milestone in Bowie's already impressive discography. ●

ELECTRONIC CAFE

For the lovers of Electronic Music

ALISON GOLDFRAPP -
THE LOVE INVENTION

This is the first solo studio album by the well-known British singer as it's without Will Gregory. Like a lot of current albums, this was created during lockdown and the first time Alison admits she had to think independently about creating music. The result? Just massive hooks, gorgeous synths awash with Alison really finding her inner Italo disco / Giorgio Moroder shoes throughout the whole album. It totally pops, shines with the class of someone who truly knows her craft. One for the summer and forever.



TURTLE-
LANDMASS

Every now and then we find an artist that just blows us away, and Glaswegian producer and songwriter Jon Cooper AKA Turtle is definitely fitting the bill. The latest release Landmass is a mix of stunning ambient textures that are almost otherworldly sounding, but there are also some tracks that would go down a storm in a cool nightclub. One of our most played current albums, further investigation on Bandcamp and this guy's previous releases are also dazzling and critically acclaimed from 6 Radio to Radio 1 etc. Turtle is a great find for us, and we are digging deeper- dive into this, you will not regret it!

A CERTAIN RATIO-
1982

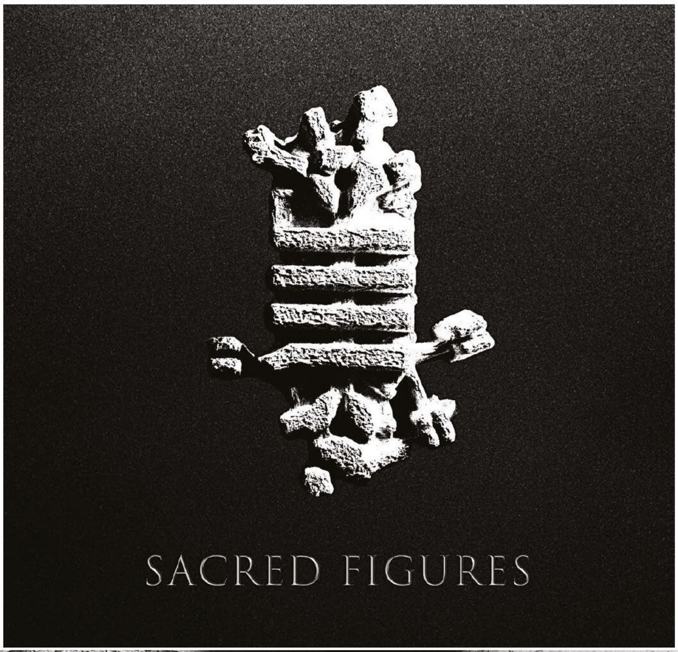
Our good friends of the EC are in cracking form on their latest and 11th Studio album. Martin, Jez and Donald are taking it all to eleven with massive slabs of cowbell tapping bass dripping funkyness with twists of indie synths and guitars and jazz-infused brilliance and we love the fact they bring in great artists like Chunky and of course Ellen Beth whose voice fits the ACR DNA so well. We totally love these guys as people and musicians and the fact they ain't stopping anytime soon needs to be celebrated, this album is an essential listen from a very special band.

VNV NATION –
ELECTRIC SUN

The latest offering from Ronan Harris has a ton of VNV familiarity, but the notch has gone up a little with this new album. There's a real sense of theatre in Harris's lyrics that really draws you in and of course with the massive synths the journey of each track is pretty amazing. VNV Nation doesn't miss. From the unrelenting opening track to the very end when you can finally exhale, Electric Sun is a masterpiece from the clever mind of Mr. Harris. Stand out tracks are 'Electric Sun', 'Run', 'Artifice', but the album is best listened to all the way through. As the opening track hits you, the story builds, and when it all ends you will just want more. Nice job Ronan!

Electronic Cafe   Electronic.Cafe   electroniccafe_music

INTERVIEW



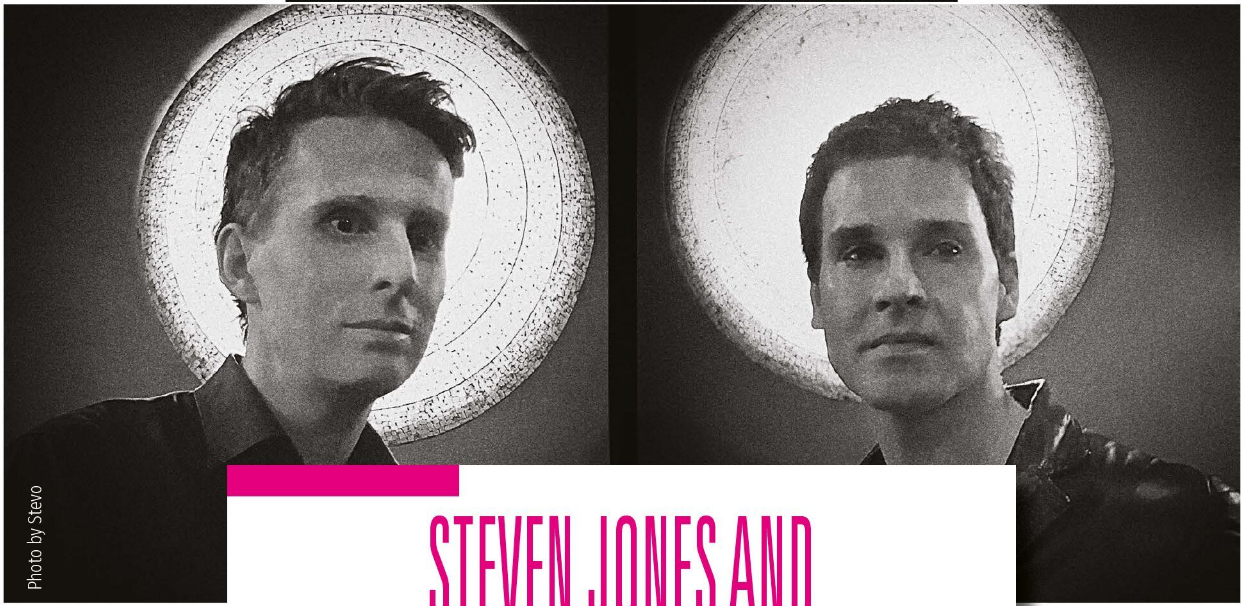


Photo by Stevo

STEVEN JONES AND LOGAN SKY

By Paul Browne

With the release of new album Sacred Figures, the long musical partnership of Steven Jones and Logan Sky offers itself up for fresh inspection. At times a darker, heavier exploration of electronic music, it's also an album that offers poignant, often elevating compositions. Or as the press release describes it: "Like deities, the album strives to be uplifting and emancipatory, but there's a deep melancholy beneath the surface." It's a shift of mood from their previous album, 2021's European Lovers, but also demonstrates that Jones and Sky are willing to experiment and push in new directions.

The pair were originally introduced to each other by the legendary Steve Strange, which provided the catalyst for everything that followed. That fortuitous moment has resulted in a clutch of albums and EPs which includes 2017 release Corrupt State, an album that also featured Steve Strange on the title track (the last track that he wrote before his untimely death in February 2015).

Blitzed spoke to Steven Jones and Logan Sky to discuss the curious inspirations behind Sacred Figures, their experiences with Steve Strange and explores the chemistry that makes the pair work so well together.

To start with, the album's origins lie in the title track itself. "We actually wrote that quite a while ago" Logan Sky comments, adding that the track predates the duo's previous album, European Lovers. "So, we decided that we'd keep the track and that became the backbone when we started working on the next album."

Steven Jones expands on this, explaining that some years prior he had penned a novel inspired by the writer Iris Murdoch ("who I was obsessed with at that time") which prompted him to write a book himself. "So Sacred Figures was the novel I wrote and it was coming from the perspective of veneration, ideas around what we consider to be sacred. The idea that if we're praying, is anyone listening? The sense of faith, belief, meaning. It comes from that particular group of ideas."

Sacred Figures also explores themes of relationships or one kind or another. "This sense of worshipping within a relationship" adds Jones "sense of venerating a figure or person and viewing that figure with meaning when perhaps it's all illusory."

"Those core philosophical dilemmas that I think we face as human beings and I think in the modern world, I perceive like a total lack of belief, a lack of faith and I think that's within modernity and what that does to humanity. That's basically the kind of core group of ideas. And you know, pulls in a lot of other stuff about emotional obsession, infatuation, sexual obsession, co-dependency, there's a whole load of stuff."

These concepts also steered the direction of the sound of the album. Sky recalls that he was "trying to make sounds a lot darker, to make you feel like you're in a cave or shrine or something that's away from the real world. Something that's like a timeless, dark place."

> **"It was coming from the perspective of veneration, ideas around what we consider to be sacred"**

Sacred Figures also features guest appearances by Jan Linton and Gary Barnacle, which prompts the question of how these musicians entered the orbit of Sky and Jones to begin with. Although Sky is unsure on precisely when these two talents began working with the pair, he's quick to point out Linton's impressive CV, which includes working with artists such as John Taylor of Duran Duran and Richard Barbieri, keyboard player of Japan. "when he did start working with us and started sending bits through, it was quite exciting. When we layered these guitar parts and some of the strange sounds he was creating using EBow, which is like a vibrating device on a guitar. When we overlaid it with our more cleaner electronic sound, it really created this sound that we loved, basically and it transformed the sound."

In the case of Gary Barnacle, who has a long history of lending his saxophone to classic acts (including Soft Cell and David Bowie among others), Sky had known about Barnacle through his sax additions to Visage and eventually they made contact. "On the last album, especially on 'European Lovers', the title track, it just transformed the song, just took it elsewhere; more sophisticated and beautiful."

The creation of Sacred Figures was, apparently, not always a solid proposition. Following their last album, there followed discussion about whether the pair wanted to do another album or not. "Then because of the demo of 'Sacred Figures' still there, sort of wanting to be addressed" comments Jones, "that enables the kind of bridge from European Lovers to this new album, because the themes were yet to be explored. We had vaguely spoken about it. What could be. And there was a sense that we could go to a more spiritual place maybe, that sense of it being that the journey could be to a more uplifted place. With the demo 'Sacred Figures' being the sort of keystone of it."

At some point, the discussion moves onto the topic of Steve Strange and stories of just how the pair met the iconic figure. In the case of Logan Sky, it was simply that he was on holiday in Norfolk and saw Steve Strange performing at a festival, prompting Sky to pass over a CD of his own music. "When I got back to London there were half a dozen voicemail messages from Steve Strange, each one increasingly more desperate, wanting me to work with him. I called him back and we kind of clicked and started working straight away. He sang his song ideas straight down the phone, and I recorded those and immediately got to work within the first week. And I had to be quick anyway, because one of my friends who's a DJ/promoter, she had a band pull out of a gig and she needed a replacement electronic act to play in Hoxton Square within a week. So, I suggested Steve and we just made it happen basically. We had three new songs, plus we played 'Fade to Grey' And 'Diary Of A Madman', which was

a fairly new track back then."

"During this time, he then rekindled his relations with Rusty Egan and that started a label, Blitz Club Records, and they basically started a new Visage album. I wasn't involved to start off with, I was just involved with Steve for when he was performing solo. And then I don't know exactly what happened, but then Rusty decided to leave the project when most of the songs have been written for Visage."

There's also plenty of anecdotes about Steve Strange that simply build on the legend, as Sky recalls. "We performed a big outdoor festival in Cologne, supporting Patrick Wolf and I remember being left on stage during a costume change that was supposed to take two minutes. The instrumental backing track ended and I had to improvise a track over some beats for a few more minutes. Still no Steve. I walked off and Steve was still semi-naked waiting for a taxi with his clothes which apparently had been left at the hotel!"

For Steven Jones, the connection with Steve Strange came from a more oblique direction. Already working on some songs with the actor Margi Clarke, those tracks had fallen across Steve Strange's radar. "Steve noticed them on social media" recalls Jones, "and then he was coming to Liverpool to do a back to the 80s type gig at a club here in Liverpool. He reached out to me on a Sunday evening and the gig was going to be the following week, so he wanted Margi to do 'Fade to Grey' and another track called 'Burning Desire'".

"That sort of kicked off my friendship with Steve and then we did a load of other stuff. Like, we did the final Visage video 'Never Enough', we shot that with him. Margi's in that. So, we were talking about all kinds of stuff, different projects, video projects, music projects. He wanted to do a solo album, some demos. We were actually going to do a cover version of 'Anyone Who Had A Heart'."

"Then, during this time, he kept saying to me 'You need to talk to Logan Sky'. He just kept on saying it to me. He would text me about it. He would just phone me out of the blue, phone me in the middle of the night. I did a track called 'Strange Magic' which I had written originally for Donna Destri - Donna Destri is Jimmy Destri from Blondie's sister - and during that time I was going to New York, doing stuff with her. She wanted me to write songs for her. One of the songs I wrote called 'Strange Magic' and I did a very basic demo for it and so we did a video which inspired Steve and it's very sort of Visage-esque.

"There was a sense that we could go to a more spiritual place maybe"

Then Logan saw it, Steve said to look at this video and then Logan contacted me and said I want to remix 'Strange Magic'. So that was the first time that Logan and I had a creative exchange."

"Logan and I were going to do demos for a new Visage album, which we were going to write and record songs, and we were going to offer these to Steve to record. Logan sent me something and I just started to write lyrics for them and I did what I considered to be guide vocals which ultimately would be Steve. Man Parrish then remixed 'She's Electric', a remix on the final Visage single. We were working with Steve, Logan and I doing these demos, Man Parrish remixing and

then Steve died. So that sort of shifted everything big time. That was like a major shock to the system. We wanted to carry on doing the creative stuff. There was like a creative momentum in it. So that we decided to record ourselves, the songs that we'd originally written for Steve and to release that and that ultimately became our first EP."

"He was definitely one of life's characters" suggests Logan Sky, "being the most colourful characters I've ever known. Obviously, deep down he had a troubled soul. His past was quite fast and furious, and he had his problems with drugs, which were well documented in his autobiography. So, I was quite wary to start with because I don't really do drugs and I thought he might be like an alien person to try to connect with, But no, we got on really well and he did have some demons, but he was on a very happy path at this stage when I met him. Really, really creative and long phone calls. So many ideas. Thinking about everything: makeup, fashion. He had his makeup tattooed on with henna, which he was really into at that point that, about 2009. He was growing in confidence and after we did that gig together in Hoxton, the confidence grew and then we performed bigger venues."Both Logan Sky and Steven Jones also performed at the funeral for Steve Strange, part of a process which Jones refers to as "keeping the flame alive". It also wasn't quite the end of the work the pair did with Strange. "On our Corrupt State album, we've got Steve, so that was the final song that Steve wrote with his image is on the cover of that, so it's as close to Visage as you could get. I see that album Corrupt State as the closing of our Visage circle." By drawing a line under proceedings, there was also a sense that the pair needed to keep moving forward themselves. "I think we're very proud of the fact that we feel like we have succeeded in not being just another synthwave act that just looks back to the early 80s" comments Jones, "we do obviously sonically, but I think we also do something else." Jones refers back to Steve Strange as a motivation in that line of thought. "He was very much a forward thinker. And that's ironic too, because I think what people think about him they seem him as very much an iconic image of the 80s. But he if he was alive today, he would be pushing everything forward creatively, with a genuine passion for living creativity, not just nostalgia. But I see him as the touchstone for what we do."The music that Sky and Jones craft comes from a broad background of formative influences. Sky recalls being too young to get to the Blitz Club in its heyday but was definitely touched by the music of the era. "I think Visage was the one that kept going to my record player each month. There's a real energy in those tracks because they were forward thinking and stylish". But this isn't to disregard some of the other vital acts of the day, with Sky musing on Japan and appreciating their "sophisticated sound". "They were a massive influence, Japan with their real musicianship and then Sylvan's melancholic side. The melancholy in the music I would enjoy. There was a bit of melancholy actually in The Human League. Some of their tracks on Dare. There wasn't all joyous excitement, like the track 'Darkness', 'Do or Die', 'Seconds' especially, I've played that track a lot."For Steven Jones, it's the likes of David Bowie, Bryan Ferry and David Sylvian that loom large, summing up their appeal through the image and the glamour they presented. "There's an element of artifice to it; romance to it. So obviously they would be figures that have influenced my sense of aesthetic and also the way that I can sing. But then I grew up listening to people like Kate Bush. That sort of wanting to say something with words, wanting to find a way of expressing which is authentic. I think one of my kind of vibes is to move through the world and find authentic expressions for whatever I've got going on."From a technical perspective, Logan Sky is keen to utilise a strong analogue sound. "I've been using Logic 5 on PC for the last 20 years for making albums, but whilst living in Hamburg last year, that computer just stopped working. I knew it was time to move on. I'd been using Logic 9 on Mac during my time performing live for Visage, so the switchover wasn't too painful."

"Also, for the backbone of the tracks I mainly use vintage hardware: Korg Polysix, Juno 106, Siel Cruise and the Yamaha CS20. I also use an old upright real piano for songwriting. So much easier to focus on the core chords and melodies without all the studio distractions." Sky also has a love for the DeepMind 6 ("for embellishment and shimmering arp sounds") while also naming a Korg Mono/Poly, Crumar Trilogy and Yamaha SS30 among his kit.

In the end, like any album release, Sacred Figures stands and falls on the quality of the music that Steven Jones and Logan Sky have conjured up. But as the Blitzed review suggests, this is a collection of songs that offer a haunting and often evocative journey that also throws up intriguing questions on faith, belief and core ideas that revolve around the human condition.

Sacred Figures is released 23 June via Etrangers Musique

A CHANGE OF HEART
40 YEARS OF ALTERED IMAGES' FINAL ALBUM BITE

By Imogen Bebb

When Scottish new wave group Altered Images - aka Clare Grogan, Jim McKinven, Michael Anderson, Tony McDaid and Johnny McElhone - first appeared on Top of the Pops in 1981, it was performing their third single 'Happy Birthday', which was also the title track of their debut album.

Watching the Top of the Pops clip back now it's easy to see (and hear) why the record got to number 2 in the UK charts, its quirky, brighter-than-sunshine sound serving to endear Altered Images to thousands around the country. Add in the band's frivolous onstage capers and singer Grogan's cheeky, girl-next-door looks, and you had a group that encapsulated 1981's alternative pop scene - a scene that valued quirkiness and peculiarity over predictability, breathless exuberance over dour solemnity, and most of all escapism and distraction over focusing on the UK's dire state of affairs at the time, which historian Dominic Sandbrook summed up in 2011 as an "economy in deep recession, unemployment rising and Margaret Thatcher's Tory Government in desperate trouble".

Fast forward two years to 1983, however, and it was a different story altogether. Pop music - even alternative pop music - had matured a great deal during this time. Garish colours, electronic novelties and unbridled frivolity were out, while brass sections, pseudo-soul and demure sophistication were in.

Altered Images, meanwhile, had undergone some changes of their own. After their second album Pinky Blue (1982) had been disappointingly received by the press (despite reaching the UK top 20 and yielding three top 40 singles, including the wistful 'I Could Be Happy') McKinven and Anderson left the group, soon to be replaced by multi-instrumentalist Steve Lironi who was once a member of fellow Glaswegian group Berlin Blondes.

But it wasn't just a different line-up that Altered Images were to take into 1983 - it was also a markedly different sound, nurtured in part by Mike Chapman (one half of the legendary 'Chinnichap' glam-era songwriting/production duo) and in part by Tony Visconti (the producer, bassist and composer most famous for his involvement with the music of

David Bowie), who each produced one half of Altered Images' third album.

The album was called Bite, and it was released on 17th June 1983.

Once a group whose trademark sound was labelled by music journalist Simon Reynolds as "fizzy and irresistible like lemonade", with Bite Altered Images stepped out ready and willing to embrace the beginnings of the incoming 'sophistipop' era, as if over the 13 months since the release of their previous album their music had hit puberty and come out the other side sounding more polished, more refined and more mature. Bite was still an Altered Images album - there was no doubt about that - but it wasn't necessarily the same Altered Images who had released Happy Birthday and Pinky Blue.

Now, they were all grown up.

This wasn't something the group had shrouded in secrecy or tried to unveil subtly either; as soon as you looked at Bite's sleeve you could tell that something had changed.

For starters the front cover was black and white, a huge contrast to the covers of Happy Birthday and Pinky Blue, both of which were adorned with vivid colours aplenty. Then there was the photograph of Grogan (who as the band's frontwoman arguably represented the changes in Altered Images' style to the most noticeable extent) on Bite's sleeve, which depicts the impish singer wearing what appears to be her finest black frock, as well as long, black gloves, a single dangling earring, and her hair swept back into a bun as if she were a dancer. In fact, Grogan is barely recognisable as the same young woman in the photographs that furnish the covers of Happy Birthday (which shows the band feasting on birthday cake by a river, balloons in tow) and Pinky Blue (which comprises neon pink text pasted onto a bright blue background along with a small picture of the band in which they appear to be covered in confetti). And it wasn't just Grogan affected by this distinct change in style; contrary to previous album covers, Bite's back cover showed the male members of the band dressed in black and grey.

Aside from the fact that the band members had obviously been out and bought themselves some nice new clothes, what this change in image tells us is that Altered Images were in fact a band who were hyperaware of how they looked and in turn how this reflected the music they were making. And whilst they may have come in for some criticism about this at the time, a concerted effort to update the way they looked was perhaps less about the group trying to follow the crowds in order to stay relevant, and more about keeping their image in line with the style of music they were now making.

Oh yes, the music...

Bite kicks off with 'Bring Me Closer', a snappy but nonetheless dark track ("it never starts it only ends / and I'm losing everything I own") that was as good a showcase as any for Altered Images' new, more polished sound, with its driving rhythm section and ensemble of strings and backing vocalists. Sadly - and rather unfairly - when it was released as the second single from the album it just about shuffled into the UK top 30 and then quickly shuffled out again, perhaps leaning a little too heavily on the standard pop tropes of the time for many of the band's fans, who had grown used to Altered Images ploughing their own lonely but tuneful furrow, always slightly removed from passing fashions and musical fads and yet always sounding relevant.

Another factor that may have played a part in 'Bring Me Closer's disappointing chart placing was the fact it had the rather difficult job of being the follow-up to Bite's lead single, the glisteningly evergreen 'Don't Talk To Me About Love', which is not only the album's highlight but also one of the most enduring tracks to come out of the early 1980s. The gradual escalation of the introduction sounds like disco for the post-disco generation, whilst the elongated rise and fall of the verses, the drum fills into the chorus, and then of course the chorus itself with its biting lyrics ("yesterdays shatter, tomorrows don't matter") and lushly-layered production make for a melting pot of melancholy and sophistication.

Other tracks on Bite that make a similar mark include the delicate 'Love To Stay', with its keyboard flecks (provided by Jethro Tull keyboardist Peter Vettese) and strains of scratchy funk guitar, as well as 'Now That You're Here' which showcases another rousing chorus and another distinctive Visconti-produced keyboard intro.

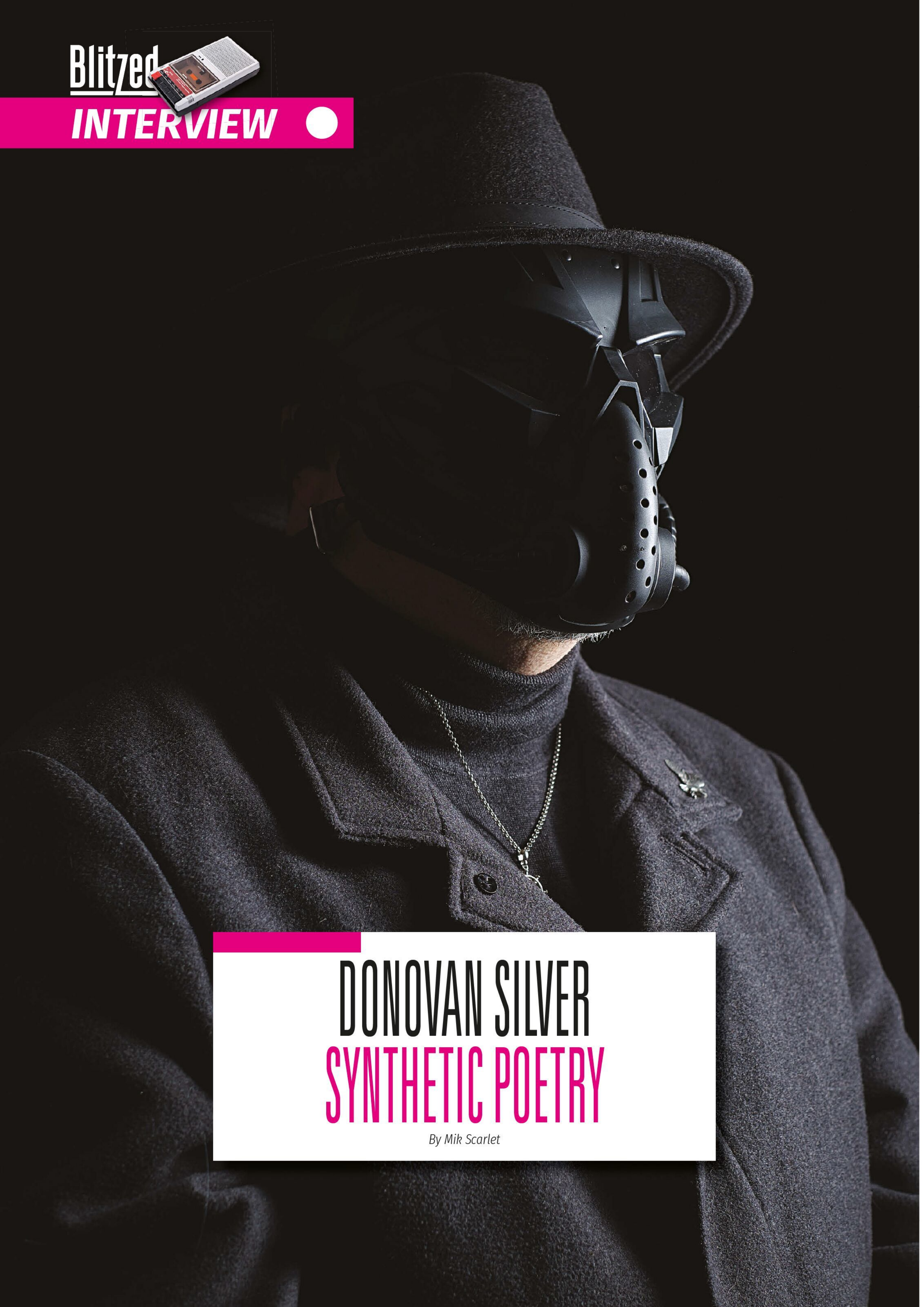
There's also downtempo, contemplative closing track 'Thinking About You' which, lyrically, could almost be the follow-up to album opener 'Bring Me Closer', as if Bite has taken us through the stages of some sort of dysfunctional relationship, beginning with the realisation that the protagonist's lover is bad for them ("you take me nowhere") and ending with the understanding that, whilst the protagonist knows she must break off the relationship ("I don't want you no more"), she also knows that she will find it difficult to move on ("I warned you, you're on my mind all the time").

All in all Bite actually sold relatively well, peaking at number 16 in the UK, but the gradually diminishing chart impact of the album's singles ('Love To Stay' peaked at number 46, whilst the chirpy 'Change of Heart' peaked at number 83) meant that following a UK tour Altered Images decided to call it a day.

That's not to say that this was the end of the story; Grogan has continued to perform under the name Altered Images throughout the 21st century, and the group's first studio album in 38 years (titled Mascara Streakz) was released in 2022.

There is also of course the legacy Altered Images left behind after their original brief but triumphant period of pop stardom, a legacy driven by their knack for writing some top-notch singles as well as developing a unique style that always seemed to align seamlessly with their ongoing musical development.

Bite is a perfect example of this legacy, and an album that one hopes has come to be viewed as such by the general public in the 40 years that have passed since its release. ●



DONOVAN SILVER
SYNTHETIC POETRY

By Mik Scarlet

I first met Donovan as a teenager at the filming of 'Love Needs No Disguise', the Dramatis track that Donovan's brother Gary Numan did the vocals on and he played drums on. He was a charming, friendly guy who was very nice to a new wheelchair user feeling a little overwhelmed by the whole experience (I owe so much to the Webb family, especially Donovan's wonderful late mother Beryl who supported my mum when I had fallen ill as a teenager). I know he went on to play on many of the Numan albums to come after as well as performing himself as solo artist and writing for other acts, but he then went on to become an airline pilot. I am very happy to hear he is back making music. With 5 EPs already available on Bandcamp, he sent me a pre-release copy of his new album Alpha, and I was blown away. A concept album of beautiful sparse instrumental/spoken word synthetic tracks that have a dreamlike quality. Truly synthetic poetry.

I had to know more, so I arranged a rendezvous with Donovan Silver.

Firstly, I was struck that Donovan hasn't changed since I met him in the 80s. Really nice, down to earth guy that after moving away from music and getting on with "real life" has returned to his first love to follow his passion. Music has been a thread throughout his life and it's always nice to chat with someone who has rekindled a love of music again. As we are the same age, it gave me hope for my disused studio sitting lonely and yet to be wired up. We began exploring what was behind each track on Alpha. Before we started getting down to the serious journo staff we laughed at the joys of getting older and how it makes you reassess your life, leading you to dive back into passions long given up on. That and how your body falls apart just as you have the confidence to be happy in your body. Arh, the cruel irony of life. Back to the point of the interview Mik....

The first track on the LP is 'Alpha', which Donovan explains is the name of an imaginary city "on a planet far far away and you're travelling towards this city" and the track charts a journey to the city. "As you get nearer and nearer, the sounds get louder and busier as if you are in the city. That's taken from the cover which is a painting of a futuristic city. "Next comes 'Mercury', which is a musical journey across the planet through its plains, craters, valleys and mountains. 'Android Guardian' is next and my vision for that is going back to the city and my idea that in the future every city will have an android guardian looking after its inhabitants, protector of the city. Then 'Prospect Hill'. It's a disused railway junction just outside Whitby, an old junction box that burnt down years ago and this track captures the sound of going on a journey on this line, down the East Coast. 'TSR2' is about a plane that never was. I think three were built. It was a 60s cold war reconnaissance aircraft but it was cancelled in the 60s and never flew, eventually being replaced with the Tornado. It's a beautiful airplane, I love it, I've always loved it, so it's my ode to that. Going back to my love of flying. 'In The Beginning', that's really a life story up

> "The industry has changed but it's still tough to get yourself out there"

to the age of 52, and it's a 'taking stock' song with spoken word on, which is new for me. Next is 'Avocet', where I try to capture the sounds of and emotions I feel about the wader bird; it being in the reeds and then flying. 'The Code War' originally was about the Enigma Machine, but after a visit to Bletchley Park it's a tribute to the men and women who worked there, some of whom are still unknown to us, who worked there in secret and we wouldn't be here today without them. 'Lammas' comes from the Pagan holiday around the beginning of August and it's my ode to that. The last of the new tracks on Alpha is 'The White Room', a room that is different for everybody. A room that makes people different, going in one person and coming out another with the mask removed. Then there are four remixes, where I took tracks with vocals on and I went back and made them fit with the feel of Alpha" A perfect journey through the album there.

I wanted to know what Donovan's experience was like trying to break into the industry back in the 80s, before he went off to be a pilot. "It was difficult for everyone. Still is today. The industry has changed but it's still tough to get yourself out there and get people to play your music. Having a famous brother didn't open up doors or get people interested. No one said 'oh yeah, because of Gary, come on in'". Of course, with the music industry's and the music press' attitude towards Gary Numan back then, I wondered if it was more of an anvil around Donovan's neck than a golden key? "I wondered whether I should mention it or not. I don't think it made life easier or more difficult. Bandcamp and things like that are great. You are independent, you can release stuff yourself and don't have to listen to a record company, if people like it great, if not so what. You don't have to create CDs or anything, it's all online, all digital so you can get your stuff out there. It's still hard to get people to know you're there, to look for you on Bandcamp or get the radio to play you." Although I wonder if Alpha is a radio album. It's so ambient that it's more a word of mouth... and magazines such as good old Blitzed.

Now, on to the tech. What gear went into the making of Alpha?

"I still have a few of the old synths. I have my Prophet 5, my Korg Z1, Roland D50 and my little Oscar. I also have some of the new Moogs, like the Grandmother. On the computer I use Omnisphere and Native Instruments Kontakt. They're some of the digital instruments. I still like to go old school". The D50 is noticeable throughout Alpha but Donovan does something special with the noticeable sound of the old classic. We spend a little too long geeking on about old synths but after a while we get to the album.

How do you start writing a track? "It varies, but usually I sit down with a master keyboard and noodle a bit. That's usually how I start. Then you develop ideas, chord progressions and go from there. Or I start with a rhythm, as I have a drum kit in the studio and I might create a groove, build a bassline and go from there. I use Logic Pro X, which is a godsend. I miss a great big recording desk, but it's amazing to have everything you had back then

> "I knew there was more to life and had a complete life change"

in your computer". Cue another geeking out moment comparing DAWs and their functions, as well as swapping stories of using old analogues live. "Oh, the originals were terrible for going out of tune. When we used to play live, all the lights came on and the synths went out of tune. Chris (Payne) and I had to have tuners in line with the synths so we could battle the tuning problems. We'd be halfway through a track and the lights would be doing their things, we'd go "here we go", as tuning went all over the place. Some of the old machines didn't do live very well. The CR78 for Remind Me To Smile, setting the tempo for that was fun. It was different every night. Got some funny looks off Cedric (the late great Cedric Sharpley) as he thought 'Are you expecting me to drum to that?'".

What next for Alpha? Any plans to take it live?

"The problem is that while I'd love to take it live, I'm not sure of where to take it. Most venues expect vocals and Alpha isn't that. I'd live to play it live. Maybe some arts venues might be interested?" I can see Alpha being performed at the Tate Modern's Turbine Rooms, or the Southbank Centre.

But what brought you back to music? "I divorced, my mum died and I retired and I thought what do I do now? I knew there was more to life and had a complete life change. That led me back to music, to my grounding. Music helped me through mum, and that let Donovan out, as it was my birth name. Let me explain that..." Donovan now tells me a story about how he came to be Gary Numan's adopted brother, a story I didn't know despite being a lifelong Numanoid. "When I was born my father died when I was 5 months old. His two favourite singers were Buddy Holly and Donovan. I was going to be called one of them and it was Donovan. When he died, his brother Tony and his wife Beryl adopted me, and changed my name to John after my father. So, from being Gary's cousin, I became Gary's brother. That's where the 'Donovan' comes from. The Silver? When I joined Tubeway Army and first started singing, mum sprayed my hair silver so I became Johnny Silver". Another insight into a family dynamic that highlight's the closeness of the "Webb/ Numan" family.

What made you decide to create an instrumental album? "Two things. I don't think I'm that good of a singer, and I really wanted this album to be ME. I want to focus on poetry with the music and have the music tell a story. I want you to be able to listen to my music and it takes you somewhere. Everyone is different and takes different things from my music."

Every track on Alpha stands up on their own, but as an album it's a stunning piece of art. It's available now via Bandcamp. So, download it, turn the stereo up, the lights down low and let Alpha take you away to some Synthetic Poetry.

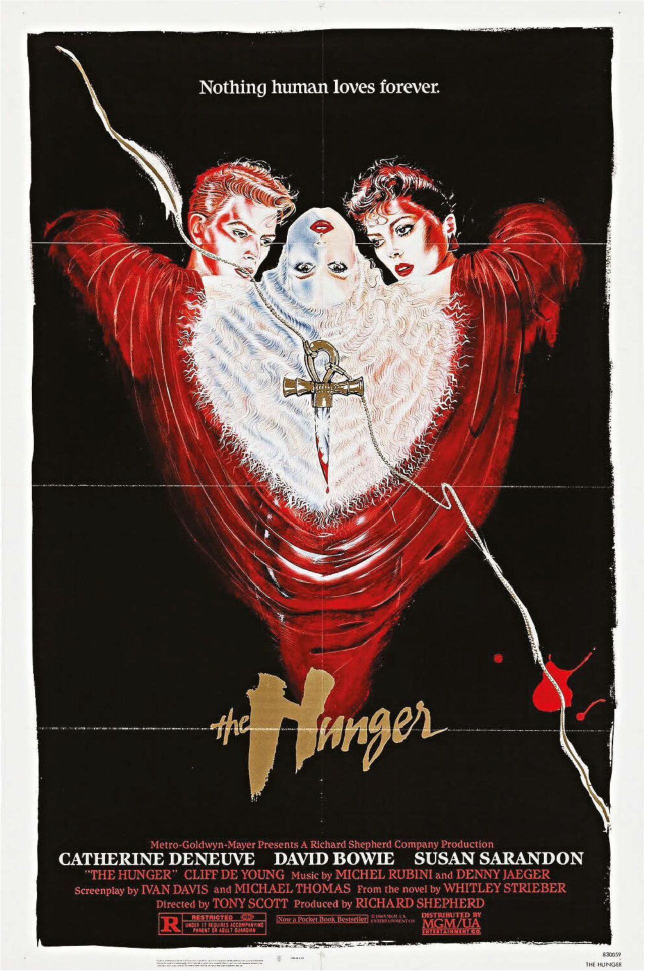
www.donovansilver.co.uk
donovansilver.bandcamp.com

THE HUNGER

By Paul Browne

1983 was a rich year for cinema, particularly with the release of classics such as Local Hero, The Right Stuff, Scarface and Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence. The last of those films was one of two titles to star David Bowie, who was still (on occasion) flexing his acting talents outside of his musical projects.

The same year saw the release of The Hunger, a stylish horror film directed by Tony Scott (brother of Ridley Scott). Starring Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon, the film is set in New York City and follows the story of a vampire couple, Miriam Blaylock (Deneuve) and John Blaylock (Bowie), who have lived for centuries without aging. Outside of the duo's hunger for blood, they arrange music lessons for students in their elegant townhouse. However, John begins to suffer from a mysterious ailment that causes him to age rapidly, leading him to seek the help of a specialist (Sarandon) to find a cure.



As a film, The Hunger attempts to strike a balance between stylized cinematography, horror and eroticism. The film certainly doesn't skimp on looking good, which is largely due to Tony Scott's background in producing commercials. The Hunger marked Scott's first foray into directing a big screen feature.

Bowie's involvement in the film followed on from another acting role, a TV adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's play Baal. Coincidently, the play was screened by the BBC on the same day that Bowie began shooting The Hunger in March 1982. Never one to take on a role lightly, Bowie's dedication to the film involved him learning how to play cello in the character of John Blaylock, rather than using a professional cello player for close-ups.

The Hunger is also notable for featuring goth outfit Bauhaus, who perform as a club act performing 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' (shot in London's iconic Heaven venue).

The film received mixed reviews at the time with Roger Ebert describing the film as "an agonizingly bad vampire movie" while The Observer's review was blunter, summing up The Hunger as "One of the most incoherent and foolish pictures of recent months." Certainly, it's not an unfair argument to suggest that Scott's film is more style over substance, although for many films of the 1980s, this was probably par for the course.

Meanwhile, Bowie fans may feel short-changed by Bowie's relatively limited screentime in this outing. Although billed as a lead, his role is secondary to the complicated drama between Deneuve and Sarandon and his character meets a sad demise halfway through the film. Bowie later commented that he felt "uncomfortable" in the role, although adding diplomatically that he "loved being in a Tony Scott movie."

For the film score, Scott wanted to focus on classical music, which made sense given the musical backdrop for the characters. As a result, musical director Howard Blake picked pieces from Schubert and Bach as well as 'The Flower Duet' by Léo Delibes, a duet between two sopranos that featured in an erotic scene between Deneuve and Sarandon. Scott was also going to use Hans Zimmer for an additional synthesiser score (on Blake's suggestion) but in the end used a score by Michel Rubini and Denny Jaeger with electronics by David Lawson.

Scott was unhappy with the film's critical reception at the time ("Hollywood just hated that movie. They called it, 'Esoteric, artsy-fartsy'"). Disheartened with his attempts to secure a Hollywood career led Scott to return to the world of advertising for some years. However, he would later return to Hollywood in 1986 with the phenomenally successful Top Gun.

"THE BIGGEST BAND IN THE WORLD"
THE POLICE
SYNCHRONICITY, 40 YEARS ON

By Imogen Bebb

Hugely influential, instantly identifiable, almost always a cut above the rest, The Police have been described as anything from the band "who opened the door for all the British acts [...] who have broken through in America since" (Smash Hits, 1980) to "The Group That Got Everything Right" (Musician, 1981) - and deservedly so. In fact, following the release of their fifth album Synchronicity in 1983, the band reached such stratospheric heights of success that they were regularly dubbed "the biggest band in the world".

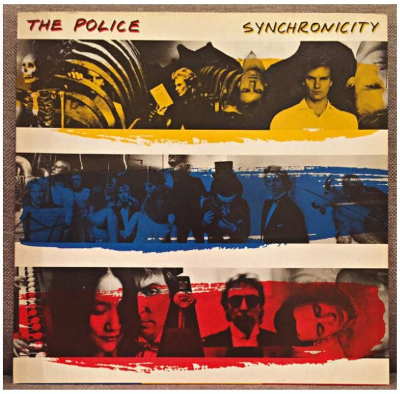
With much of its material inspired the works of Arthur Koestler (in particular his 1972 book The Roots of Coincidence), Synchronicity was an enormous success, spawning four hit singles including 'Every Breath You Take' (which was voted the UK's Favourite 80s Number 1 in 2015), receiving 3 Grammy Awards, attracting rave reviews from critics and selling over 20 million copies worldwide.

This might all sound a little over the top, but when you listen to the album - or even just the singles - it becomes a little easier to believe that at the time critics were describing Synchronicity as "a work of dazzling surfaces and glacial shadows" (Stephen Holden, Rolling Stone) or even "a widescreen drama with a fascination at a molecular level" (Richard Cook, NME). The latter writer is particularly veracious in his judgement, with many of the songs on Synchronicity playing out like mini dramas, each with their own intricately woven narratives and intensely fascinating musical details that allow something new to be heard with nearly every listen.

For a start there's the two title tracks ('Synchronicity I' and 'Synchronicity II'), both of which were inspired partly by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's theory of the same name. Both are also suitably anarchic in their own way, almost harking back to the band's early punk-infused days; 'Synchronicity I' rattles and ricochets its way to chaos with its distinctive synth intro and chorus vocals that overlap until the song reaches a point of near-dissonance, whilst 'Synchronicity II' has more of a recognisable structure but barely lets up in its relentless pace, overseen by at-times indistinguishable lyrics, brazen guitars and thrashing drums. Both tracks also seem to represent some kind of frustration with the world and its overarching forces, a feeling to which many listeners would likely have been able to relate in 1983, what with Cold War tensions on the rise and the IRA terrorising the UK.

But whilst it's anarchic moments like these (as well as the truly terrifying Summers-penned 'Mother', reportedly inspired by his own Mother and her coercive tendencies) that remind us The Police can be wired, wild and whacky whenever they choose, much of Synchronicity is dominated by tracks that have a certain eerie sophistication.

'Every Breath You Take' is the obvious example, its iconic riff and lyrics written from the point of a possessive lover giving the song a claustrophobic feel, with co-producer and engineer Hugh Padgham's unconventional recording techniques (such as asking Copeland to record the drum part in the studio's dining room to achieve a livelier sound) arguably lending the track the sheen and mass appeal that has since seen it become the most performed song in the history of American performing rights organisation BMI.



'Wrapped Around Your Finger' and 'King of Pain', the third and fourth single releases from the album respectively, weave similarly detailed tales - the former an atmospheric account of a love affair with a twist, the latter a morbidly catchy and poetic list of symbols of pain - whilst 'Tea In The Sahara', the album's closing track, is dominated by its creeping bass line, hazy guitar plucks and astonishingly simple but memorable vocal line, all of which serve to instantly dispatch the listener to the untainted land of its namesake desert "beneath the sheltering sky".

The concept of Synchronicity's intricately woven narratives even extends as far as the album's artwork and physical presentation, where a few little secrets were waiting to be revealed; the vinyl of the original pressing for instance, when held up to the light, was revealed to be purple rather than black, whilst the album's cover art (with its striking series of photographs of the band members overlaid with coloured stripes) was available in 36 different variations, meaning that you could buy multiple copies of the album and the sleeve of each one might be slightly different.

But let us return to the music on Synchronicity, and how, if you take into account the vivacious originality of the songs on the album, and how an almost perfect balance of mass appeal and underlying musical complexity is achieved throughout, it's no wonder it sold so many copies. Add in some glistening production and the group's continued penchant for gargantuan tours (the Synchronicity world tour went on for eight months, encompassing 105 shows) and it shouldn't come as too much of a surprise that by 1983 there really was no escaping The Police.

This is something that has been acknowledged even in hindsight; in 2007 for instance, music journalist John Pidgeon noted that "by the early 80s, of course, the Police had become the biggest band in the world, in August 1983 playing Shea Stadium in New York, a marker for mega-popdom set in 1965 by the Beatles".

But despite their exponential success, all was not rosy for the group. In the same article as above Pidgeon reminds us that "by [1983] the three were reputed to be permanently at each other's throats". Ongoing disagreements and tensions between the trio - particularly Sting and Copeland - were threatening to split the group apart, with rumours circulating of frequent fist fights and each member having to record their parts in separate rooms of the studio as a result.

Although one imagines that these stories must have been exaggerated somewhat by the press, it seems that there was in fact more than a little truth in these rumours. In his 2007 memoir One Train Later, Summers describes the process the band went through when

deciding on Synchronicity's running order, letting his readers know that it wasn't necessarily he or Copeland who made any final decisions; "Sting likes this idea, and thus it is ordained" he writes cuttingly.

Co-producer and engineer Padgham, meanwhile, has also readily admitted that the recording sessions were often stressful. "By the time of Synchronicity, they were sick of each other" he said of the trio, speaking to Richard Buskin for Sound On Sound in 2004. "Sting and Stewart hated each other, and although Andy didn't show as much venom, he could be quite grumpy — and there were both verbal and physical fights in the studio. Often, when these would take place, I'd try to be Mr. Producer and get in the way, saying, 'Come on, do you have to kick the shit out of one another?' but they'd just turn around and shout 'Get out of it! What do you know? You don't know anything about us!'"

With regards to the rumours that the band had to record in different rooms to prevent fights breaking out, however, in a 1983 edition of Musician magazine Sting indicated that this was in fact done to make the recording process easier. "If we played together [...] in the same room, we wouldn't be able to hear anything except the drum, because the guitarist has to have a lot of volume to hit a certain level of distortion or passion or emotion. [...] I have visible contact with Andy at all times through the glass, and with Stewart via the monitor and vice versa".

But irrelevant of whether or not these rumours were exaggerated, one can't help but give in to the feeling that there is a certain tension permeating much of Synchronicity, a nagging, menacing kind of tension that isn't necessarily present on any of the group's previous albums. As MOJO writer David Buckley said of the album's 2003 reissue, Synchronicity was "the work of a disintegrating unit", and it seems that the deeper you dig into the songs and their composition, the more apparent this becomes.

The slick, hypnotic nature of 'Every Breath You Take' for instance could be partly attributed to the fact it was made up entirely of overdubs, after there were so many failed takes due to disagreements that the idea of recording the song in a conventional way had to be abandoned. The addictive insistence of tracks like 'Synchronicity I', 'Synchronicity II' and 'Walking In Your Footsteps' could be down to the fact Sting was intent on pushing the Oberheim DSX sequencer used on the tracks to its limit. "I had this bizarre relationship with this machine" he admitted to Vic Garbarini. "I pushed it too far".

Then there's the paranoia that skulks menacingly in and out of 'Miss Gradenko' ("you've been letting your feelings show / are you safe Miss Gradenko?") and 'O My God' ("my God you must be sleeping / wake up, it's much too late"), and the graphic images that gradually unravel themselves in 'King of Pain' ("there's a skeleton choking on a crust of bread"), 'Wrapped Around My Finger' ("I will turn your face to alabaster") and of course, 'Mother' ("oh Mother dear please listen / don't devour me").

Earlier in this piece I said that, of the two reviews I cited, it was Richard Cook's for NME that did the best job of encapsulating Synchronicity, describing the album as "a widescreen drama with a fascination at a molecular level".

But having really considered the nature of the music on Synchronicity and the circumstances under which it was written, perhaps it's actually Stephen Holden's review for Rolling Stone that's more accurate.

Because as sophisticated, intricate and deliciously compelling as the songs on the album might be, at Synchronicity's core is the dark, brooding sound of a band in turmoil, of a tightly-knit unit that is gradually being split apart from the inside.

Yes, there's some seriously accomplished songwriting at play, as well as some incredible musicianship and a glossy, tasteful style of production that fits the music like a glove. But as Holden so perceptively put it, it's the "dazzling surfaces and glacial shadows" of Synchronicity that elevate it to the status of an album that didn't just sound perfect 40 years ago, but continues to sound perfect today. ●

Photos by Fernando García Pérez

JOHN OWEN WILLIAMS

By Kevin Burke

There is no denying that when it comes to music, John Owen Williams is gifted with the Midas touch. Having produced two number one albums for Paul Heaton and Jacqui Abbott, Manchester Calling (2020) and last year's N.K-Pop, he stepped out as a musician in between those and released his own debut album Out Of Darkness (2021). After the critical acclaim bestowed upon that glorious long-player, he returns once more with his second release as The John Williams Syndicate with Into The Light. "The running order was slavishly thought about," John is quick to point out. Where the sunny, jangle pop opener 'I Started Something' forms the perfect entrance to this new adventure. "It did seem like the logical start. I was going to tail end it with 'My Love Is', but I got caught up in the song 'In My Dreams' where I name checked a lot of artists I am influenced by or had worked with."

His approach as before is well thought out, though this album Into The Light acts more of an extension of, rather than a follow-up to Out Of Darkness. "I thought about how I should approach it, and in the end I tried to make a half hour radio programme. Where each song is different to the previous one, but they are all about the same thing - this magical world where there is perfect love and one's cup is half full all the time despite the circumstances. It is hopefully a joyous experience."

This album is a worthwhile celebration of love and life, where every song takes a different style but skilfully manages to fit with the proceeding or previous track.

"I was thinking about doing my third album, and I think if I was to do it by myself it would sound a bit like Nick Drake meets Tom Petty. But I would not do it as well as either of them."

The John Williams Syndicate consists of the artists John has surrounded himself with to create such a vast sound

Photo: Rossis social media

of inspired passion. He is joined once again by the legendary Petula Clark, the captivating Claudia Brücken, and newcomer, in the dazzling Nicki Leighton-Thomas. "I thought she (Nicki) would be good as a backing vocalist, and she came round and did backing vocals on 'Don't Go', I thought she could sing something else as well. In the end she has taken the lead on two songs and on backing vocals on two or three others. She has this amazing voice, which gives her the ability to sing Pop, soprano, and also sound like Marianne Faithfull." Continuing on the ideals of The Syndicate; "It is called The Syndicate because John Williams is such a common name with the other greats. The Syndicate has a lot of great musicians helping me, but essentially it is me." Also, an appearance by John Moore (Jesus And Mary Chain) brings another texture to the sound. "John Moore is a really clever guy, who has made about thirteen solo albums. I hadn't seen him in thirty years, but he got in touch through Instagram, and I played him 'Don't Go' and he said; "I can sing that" and he did."

Further, John provides an insight into how even things that were not planned out can reap rewards, but then again it is down to who you know. "When Stephen Large, the keyboard player from Squeeze, came round one morning for forty-five minutes, I managed to put him onto two tracks. What 'In The Morning Sun' needed was a Procol Harum, 'Whiter Shade Of Pale' kind of organ lick, and he captured exactly what I wanted. He is actually the keyboard player on all the Paul Heaton records."

Though an experienced producer, John has not drenched the album with sound in any Phil Spector, wall of sound framework. "The arrangement of tracks is everything. To get to this minimalist state, I do go the Phil Spector, kitchen sink route to start with, and then I go weeding. It is then I am ruthless and taking out guitar parts and keyboard parts, and just letting things breathe. But I do go the other way first."

Perfection and commitment however are the foundations of where John is coming from, and luckily he has the space to challenge himself effortlessly. "I started recording last June, after I finished Paul's (Heaton) last album. Basically, seven days a week, fifteen hours a day tinkering. Sometimes going down an avenue, completing a song, and if I was going to do it with someone else singing it, it was going to have to be in a different key, so I just started again."

An artist, who is evolving both finding his feet as a musician again and not just a songwriter. "On the first album I was pitching in the dark, I was coming from nowhere. Now with Into The Light I am coming from somewhere. A lot of people like the first album, and I have the confidence to say; "Right I can do this." Which I thought on the first album, but I have something to say which is unique now. Interestingly, since I finished this record I have been doing a lot of recording with Nicki Leighton-Thomas, and suddenly

my guitar playing has advanced in its complexity."

As we learn more about this musician, he has other projects running concurrently, and he is bringing full circle to the music he began creating at the genesis of his career. "I am compiling my East Side Band album. I was signed to Mickie Most at RAK (Records) in the late seventies, 1979, under the moniker East Side Band. A band that never played live, but we made one single for RAK which was Kid Jensen's record of the week at Radio One. But we recorded nine tracks, and I put out another single in 1981 which became Terry Wogan's record of the week on Radio Two. Then I started managing Blancmange, and my whole entire solo career fell by the wayside."

Anyone who listened to and bought music in the eighties and nineties, could have at least one album or single John had a hand in. "I often think to myself as I am doing another overdub or guitar part; I was doing this at University with my Teac 4-track fifty years ago, and life has not changed at all. I think I have always been destined to do this, but along the way I had to do a few other things to get here. Sitting on both sides of the fence."

Those other referred things are important in the context of music and experience in an industry that constantly challenges and changes. However, the fact remains there are a lot of recordings and artists the name John Owen Williams is attached to. And it is an interesting venture into the importance of this artist. "I have been a record executive running my own label through Universal, being head of A&R at Polydor, Chrysalis and Sanctuary, and they are different skill sets altogether. I now feel confident in myself to say right now it is my turn."

That stint of A&R had John mixing with a diverse range of artists such as Jethro Tull, and Level 42, while signing The Wonder Stuff and Cathy Dennis. As a producer, he helped create some of the most interesting music, and albums of the last forty years. For example, as a Radio One session producer, he produced bands such as The Cure, Simple Minds, Killing Joke, The Birthday Party, and The Waterboys, though he also took the reins of management at an early stage. "It is very interesting. When I produced all the Radio One Live sessions in the eighties, it was against the backdrop of the New Romantics and the Blitz Club. I was doing stuff, which was quite rebellious against the New Romantics, even though I was managing Blancmange, who were not New Romantics, but were on the scene of that. But it was quite interesting with Spandau Ballet and those kinds of artists doing their stuff, and I was making Housemartins' records which were completely out of the time and fashion. But just damn good tunes and damn good lyrics. Both the Housemartins and The Proclaimers - they have gone on and are still playing stadiums."

> "I was doing stuff which was quite rebellious against the New Romantics."

It is worth mentioning that where Housemartins are concerned, John produced both London 0 Hull 4 and the seminal The People Who Grinned Themselves to Death. Also, the number one single, the a capella 'Caravan Of Love' which topped the charts in late 1986. Taking that first album, London 0 Hull 4 that broke the band into the public eye, John took his methods to produce the band from the CCR frontman John Fogerty. An unlikely source which now makes perfect sense when talking of the methods used to create that debut. "I saw him (John Fogerty) play in Toronto, in 1971 with Booker T. And The Mg's supporting him, that was when I was at university in Canada. When I made the first Housemartins' album, Creedence Clearwater Revival was the template of the way I wanted to record it. Creedence records were always seemingly thrown together, and they just sound like a live band. But he (Fogerty) was meticulous on each instrument going down, and probably nobody else would see the tangible link between Creedence and Housemartins, but in my mind they were the template of sound."

Whether or not Paul Heaton and the band was aware of the producer's direction, or indeed the influence that got the familiar sounds we know today, it remains irrelevant. That music has stood the test of time and perhaps aided to the relationship the pair still share today. "Their songs on the first album were fully written and rehearsed, and played in. So, I was just trying to capture a band in full flow with overdubs. Paul has always had a very clear idea of how he wants to sound right from the start, so it made it that much easier when you work with an artist who has that vision himself."

How John Owen Williams has earned his righteous place as an artist and paid some incredible dues along the way cannot be in any way understated. Presently he has reached a point in his life where he is free to create the music he wants to and produce the music without outside interference and honing the life experience into his latest venture. And he has that dream studio that sits at the bottom of his garden. "I am so lucky and privileged, I have been doing this for a long time, and I am in the Autumn of my career. I just think "Fuck it!" I want to keep doing it as much as I can for as long as I can, as long as I am able to do it."

Though he is on one hand an acclaimed producer, stepping out and leading his own outfit, carving out The John Williams Syndicate as an entity in its own right, could perhaps be where he is now happiest. "I have worked at it. I mean it has not been a clear path all the way. But I have really slugged it out. If Paul Heaton asked me to captain the ship of his new album, I would say "Yes!" in a heartbeat. But if he said "John, your time is up" I would take that as well, because I have this to do."

Finally, the passion and love John has for his craft, for music and creating memorable sounds is all inspiring, as he puts it himself. "It is a constant, it is like eating or breathing. I come down here (Shed Studio) and I compose, write, try things out, and I think; does that tambourine work with that snare? It is a bizarre world." ●

The Teardrop Explodes
the teardrop explodes
sleeping
gas
camera
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workers
dream
fades
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
PASSIONATE FRIEND
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES UNRELEASED AND RARENESS
ZOO!
The Teardrop Explodes
TEARDROP T EXPLODES
SERIOUS DANGER
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
KILIMANJARO
To The Shores Of Lake Placid
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
WHEN I DREAM
Tiny Children
Rachael Built A Steamboat
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
Treason
(It's Just a Story).
The Teardrop Explodes
The Teardrop Explodes
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ETHEREAL ADVENTURES
THE TEARDROP EXPLODES

by Paul Browne

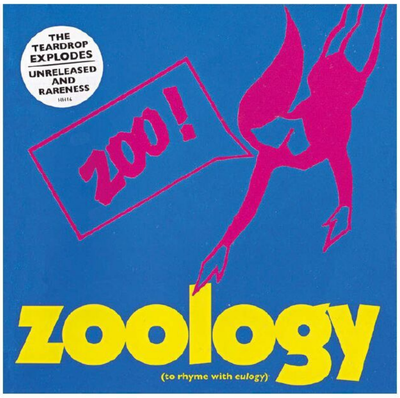
The musical catalogue of Liverpool band The Teardrop Explodes is peppered with pop gems, psychedelic delights and baroque ballads.

In this special feature, Blitzed takes you on a journey through the band's music which tracks their evolution from glorious beginnings through to their sad yet inevitable demise. Along the way, we include singles, classic album tracks and some oddities and rarities thrown into the mix.

SLEEPING GAS

The debut single release from The Teardrop Explodes, released in 1979. The song's mesmerising rhythms, bass groove and Julian Cope's echo-washed vocals have a raw, simple appeal.

'Sleeping Gas' consequently became Single of the Week in the music press at the time. Sounds summed the song up, describing it as "...sturdy, danceable as disco, reggae, 'Louie Louie' or '96 Tears' and sounding like nothing else I ever heard."



FROM FIVE MILES UP

An early energetic instrumental driven by some tight percussion and insistent organ riffs, it demonstrated a harder edge to the fledgling band.

The title had been inspired by a book about the Vietnam war exploring mental breakdown among soldiers (the book also inspired the song 'Went Crazy').

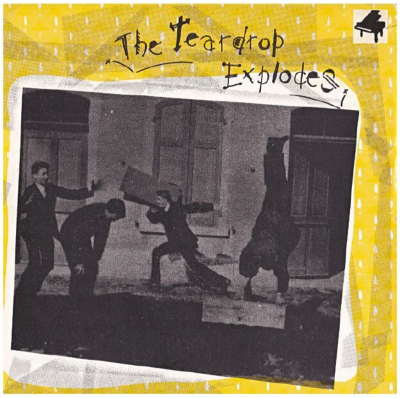
This track had originally been recorded at Liverpool's MVCU in 1978. Subsequently lost for many years it later turned up as part of The 2004 Zoology compilation.

THE TUNNEL

An instrumental that was slotted for inclusion on the legendary 1979 compilation Street To Street but was inadvertently recorded over by an engineer at the time.

Another example of the raw, punky approach by early Teardrops. The simple guitar and chugging percussion offer a dynamic quality and there's hints here of the psychedelic direction the band would later move in.

Julian Cope commented at the time that they had recorded a version with lyrics but that they "were crap".

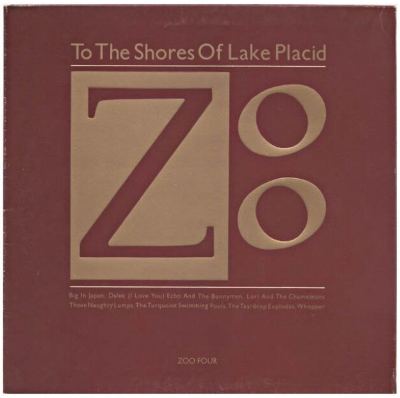


BOUNCING BABIES

Released as a single in July 1979, the perky 'Bouncing Babies' demonstrated the more pop-orientated direction the band were adopting.

"I'd had the riff since late '77" commented Cope in his book Head-On, "but when I fell in love with The Pop Group's 'She Is Beyond Good And Evil', I ripped off its staccato rhythm completely".

The single proved so hard to get that The Freshies released a single called 'I Can't Get Bouncing Babies By The Teardrop Explodes'.

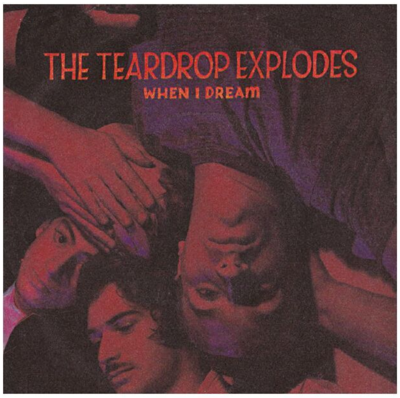


TAKE A CHANCE

'Take A Chance' had originally been recorded by the band as part of the Cargo Studio sessions in 1979.

The song has a jaunty, euphoric quality care of its repetitive melodic riff and some perky organ lines.

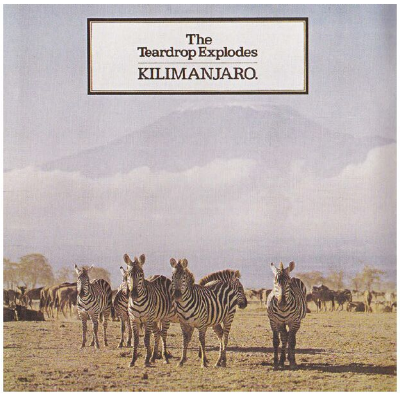
'Take A Chance' later appeared on the 1982 compilation album To The Shores Of Lake Placid (which also featured contributions from Echo & The Bunnymen, Big In Japan and 'alternative universe' Teardrop Explodes band Whopper).



WHEN I DREAM

Originally inspired by The Seeds and described by Cope as "Just a celebration of being in love", 'When I Dream' dates back to 1979. A new version (featuring the production talents of Mike Howlett) was released as a single in 1980.

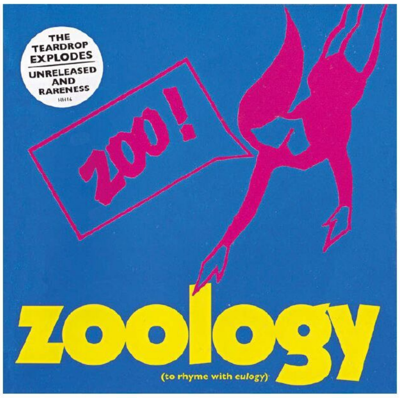
Part of the song's charm is a "sparkly toy-piano part" added to the song by Dave Balfe, but the whole composition has a romantic pop appeal that's tough to ignore. Sadly, the single failed to make a sizeable chart impact.



POPPIES IN THE FIELD

As featured on the Teardrops' debut album Kilimanjaro, the pastoral 'Poppies In The Field' is a dreamy, introspective outing which also boasts some psychedelic backwards guitar from Alan Gill.

The introspective elements in the lyrical narrative ("I see a change in you/Can you see a change in me?") adds to the charm of this classic album track. As with tracks such as 'When I Dream', it also demonstrated that the band were capable of more emotional depth.

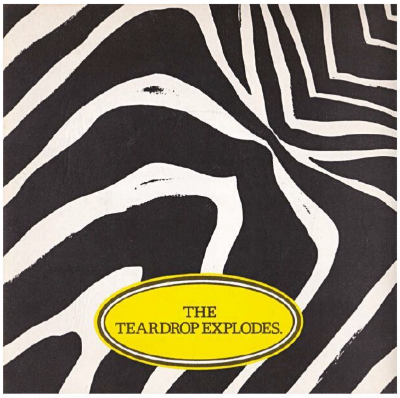


NOBODY KNOWS THIS IS EVERYWHERE

Another 'lost' song (also known as 'For Years') cooked up between Julian Cope and Alan Gill. The song had originally been recorded at Gill's studio back in 1980.

A typically brash and sweeping number with some effective bass fills and synth washes, 'Nobody Knows This Is Everywhere' also employs some nice vocal lifts. Its pedigree is clearly in-step with similar songs of the era, including 'Reward' and 'Treason'.

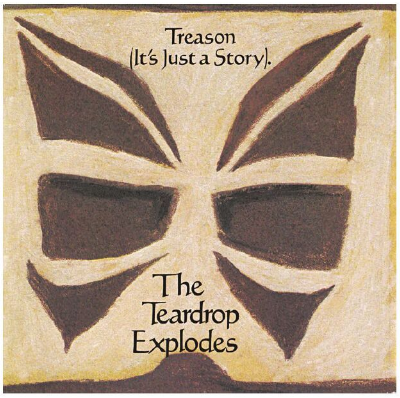
It eventually appeared on the 2004 Zoology compilation.



REWARD

Released in 1981, The Teardrop Explodes' most successful single, reached No. 6 in the UK charts. The song's anthemic arrangement, beefed up by brass fanfares, made this a surefire hit. The song's genesis was inspired by Alan Gill, although Gill had left the band by this point. Cope later recalled that the song sounded "like a spy theme and completely breakneck".

Around this time, a new incarnation of the Teardrops formed with Troy Tate (guitar), Jeff Hammer (keyboards) and Alfie Agius (bass).



TREASON (IT'S JUST A STORY)

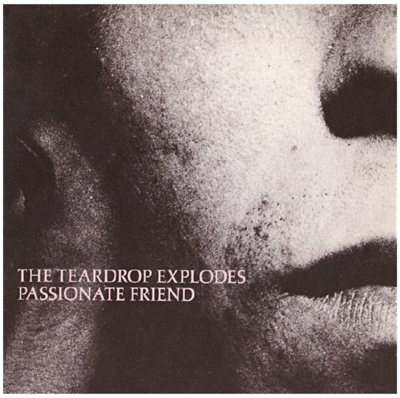
Originally released in 1980, this new version of 'Treason' was issued in the hopes of capitalising on the success of 'Reward'. Conceived by Cope as a song about "rivalry and freaking out", 'Treason' certainly boasted a tightly arranged pop classic. The song's lyrical musings on "Mirror-hopping days" were inspired by Cope's interest in checking himself out in car wing mirrors.

'Treason' didn't quite achieve the lofty hights of their hit single, but still managed a top 20 position.

HA-HA I'M DROWNING

Phonogram had scheduled the release of this Kilimanjaro single without the band's knowledge or approval, leading to its withdrawal (original copies are now rare). Under new sleeve art, it was subsequently issued in Europe as a single.

The choppy, upbeat qualities of the song still show a band at their best, although it's a fair argument that it wasn't necessarily the best single material.

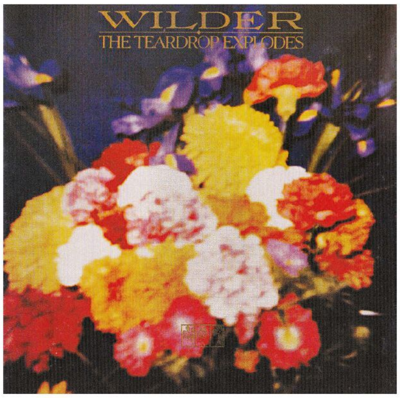


PASSIONATE FRIEND

The underrated second album Wilder featured one of the band's finest moments in the form of 'Passionate Friend'.

Subsequently released as a single in August 1981, it's simply a glorious, euphoric anthem (apparently inspired by Ian McCulloch's sister). The subtle brass gives the song a flourish. It's also an effective use of the vocal refrain of "ba-ba-ba-ba-ba" that would serve Julian Cope well in the future.

Sadly, the single only managed to reach No. 25 in the UK charts.



THE CULTURE BUNKER

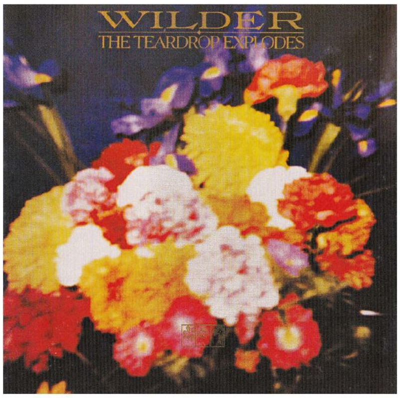
As featured on second album Wilder, classic track 'The Culture Bunker' was based on Julian's opinions on the Liverpool music scene of the time.

In his book Head-On, Cope commented that the song reflected "my meanness and inability to get off on the success of the Bunnymen and Liverpool in general. The open bitchiness of the song assuaged some of my guilt and the chorus refrain was aimed straight at Mac: 'I feel cold when it turns to gold for you".

COLOURS FLY AWAY

Released as a single in November 1981, 'Colours Fly Away' was a tightly arranged affair that employed a perfect balance of brass and bravado. The abstract quality of the lyrics still offers confessional lines such as "More by luck than judgement here am I".

The single unfortunately didn't make a huge chart impact, limping in to No. 54. There were discussions at the time that album track 'Bent Out Of Shape' would have been a better choice.



THE GREAT DOMINIONS

Wilder's original album title had been The Great Dominions, but this doesn't diminish the power of the (former) title track. The composition is a fine example of the sweeping, romantic approach that Cope was moving in, while also offering up some introspection ("I'm only concerned with looking concerned").

Unfortunately, none of these grand gestures could save Wilder as an album, which was seen as Phonogram's flop of the year in 1981.

TINY CHILDREN

Another of Wilder's beautiful moments, 'Tiny Children' is driven almost entirely by Cope's impassioned vocal. There's hints of uncertainty and doubt in the lyrics, but the reflective nature of the song adds to its romantic appeal.

The final single release from Wilder, it fared little better than its predecessor, managing to reach No. 44.

RACHAEL BUILT A STEAMBOAT

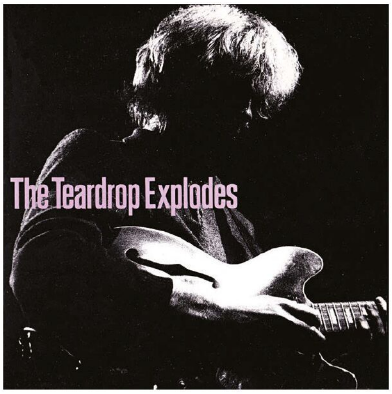
The Teardrops were capable of serving up some quirky and intriguing B-side tracks in their time. Then there's this slice of baroque pop genius dreamt up by Dave Balfe, over which Cope adds a storybook narrative about Rachael and her self-built steamboat.

With minimal percussion and an emphasis on moody synths, the whole track is utterly hypnotic.

LOG CABIN

The pastoral beauty of 'Log Cabin' had been conceived as part of the band's planned third album. As featured on a 1982 radio session, the track later appeared on a 2007 Peel Sessions compilation.

Featuring Kate St John on oboe and Nicky Holland on cello, the strings lend this song a stately quality (St John and Holland were former members of The Ravishing Beauties who supported the Teardrops during their 1981/82 UK tour dates).



SUFFOCATE

Appearing as an additional track on the 1983 EP version of 'You Disappear From View', 'Suffocate' is another wistful ballad that's considered a lost classic. Lines such as "Love has gone from this house/And My my how I cried" have a doomed romantic quality.

Known as the 'Baroque Version', this take of 'Suffocate' featured string arrangements by Nicky Holland. Subsequently, there's a classical sheen on this composition that elevates it above a simple pop song.

YOU DISAPPEAR FROM VIEW

One of the last Teardrops tracks to be recorded, it was also posthumously released as a single in 1983. Cope had dreamt up 'You Disappear From View' as "a wistful ballad to an unseen girl, the kind who would not come running every time I called". However, the single version was given an overhaul to produce a brash, brassed-up funk workout.

This radio session version is much closer to the vision that Cope was aiming for.

SERIOUS DANGER

The aborted third album sessions demonstrated a clear difference of opinion in which way to take the band between Julian Cope and Dave Balfe. 'Serious Danger' demonstrates an amped-up approach which was clearly aiming for a more dancepop direction. The burbling rhythms here certainly seem to have hints of the forthcoming Acid House scene lurking in its DNA.

Released as a single, this track also appeared on an intriguing 1990 attempt to present a version of the third album.

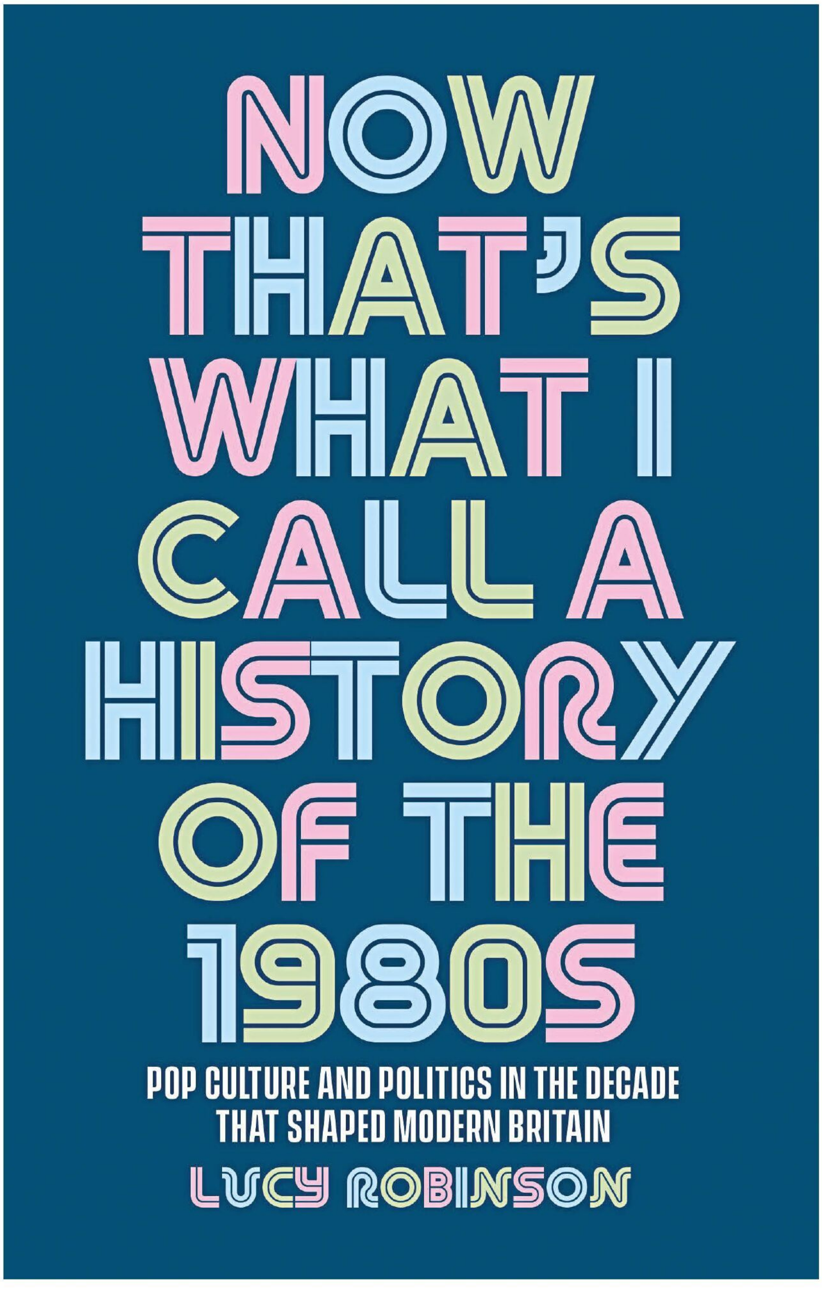
Now that's what I call a history of the 80s

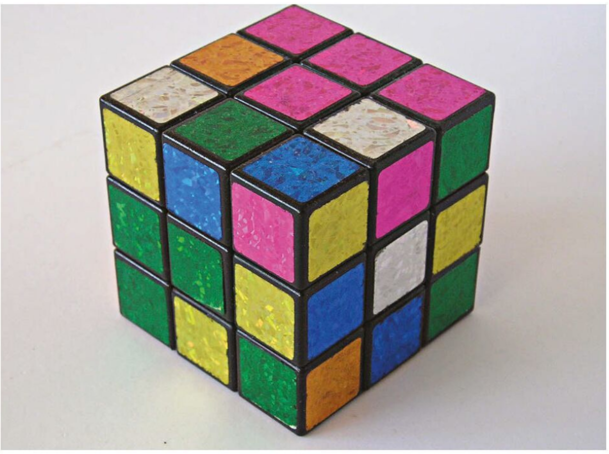
by Lucy Robinson

I've been writing about the 1980s for twice as long as the decade lasted. During that time sometime the Eighties have sometimes felt very current in our lives, and at other times the decade has felt like it came from a completely different universe. I thought I'd play with some parts of the Eighties felt most present whilst I was writing my forthcoming book Now That's What I Call History of the 1980s, and which ones we are still working through.

There have been numerous perennial issues from the Eighties that seem to have bubbled away largely unchanged; the costs of royal wedding and moral values of the monarchy for example. Meanwhile, the tabloids treatment of Prince Harry's and new wife raises numerous comparisons with his mother Diana. King Charles' recent coronation alongside his consort Camilla, seems to expunge Diana's memory completely. Other stories from the Eighties have suddenly had a change of ending, opening out decades of low bubbling disagreements into complete changes of direction, over the politics of Europe and Brexit for example. We might be forgiven for forgetting that the Conservatives spent much of the Eighties as the pro-Europe party, Thatcher won the 1979 election as a pro-Europe candidate.

During the decade plus I spent completing NTWICH80s, various Eighties ghosts popped up to surprise me. The ownership of the Falklands/Malvinas for example has cropped up a few times in the last decade. The handing of Hong Kong to China has similarly continued to raise protests and challenges. Debates over contraception and reproductive control raised by the Alton Bill, the





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Victoria Gillick case and Depo-Provera in the Eighties, have never quite felt securely resolved. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party reignited debates over the renationalisation of railways, as well as the shadows of Michael Foot, and the loony left. Royal Commissions, and campaigns for inquiries, inquests and investigations disasters and traumatic events in the Eighties have brought closure for effected families, but exposed the failings of the structures and systems in the process.

The inquiry into the sinking of the pleasure boat The Marchioness on the River Thames in August 1989 wasn't launched until families and friends of the 51 people campaigned for eleven years, before a public inquiry was launched in 2000. It took until 2012 for the victims of the Hillsborough disaster to be exonerated and the policing decisions at the event and in the wake of the disaster to be exposed. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)'s independent investigation into Hillsborough to the largest independent investigation into alleged police misconduct ever carried out in England and Wales. This had been the sixth attempted investigation into the disaster since it happened in April 1989.

In NTWICH80s, I try to capture an Eighties that is both familiar and distant. The ideas that had been developed by scholars, commentators, and artists to make sense of their world in the 1980s could, I hoped, help us connect with both the closeness of the decade and its difference from the world we live in now. Inspired by the montage, compilation album or top ten chart, I gave up trying to squeeze the decade into a simple clear story, and instead I embraced the messy, incoherent, complicated and compromising sense of the decade. So instead of one big story of the decade I take a series of different moments or objects from which I can explore the complicated relationship between the big questions (the nation, the state, the cold war, the environment, gender, and race for example) and the cultural moments that captured audience's attention (Bananarama singing about Northern Ireland, Roland Rat taking over Breakfast TV, the tabloid value of photos of Princess Diana's legs). NTWICT80s also maps the links and the blurred lines, between these different types of historical evidence; alongside traditional archival evidence and government

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record sit contemporary documentary, music and the legislation effecting its broadcast, popular television and the controversies it raised, official portraiture and tabloid photography, pop star memoirs and politician's diaries. In each chapter I try and show the ways that popular culture does more than illustrate historical change, it makes stuff happen and helps artists and audiences to make sense of their world, critique it and try to build a better future. This is a history where popular culture is the driving force, rather than an illustration and where festival stages, fancy dress costumes, boardgames and pop-up books, are as important as government policy, international agreements and manifesto promises.

My list of events, objects and themes won't be the same as the list any of my readers would come up with, I'm sure. We all have moments or events that resonate with us more than others, some of them might overlap, but they are never going to be exactly the same. And that's half the fun.

THREE ECHOES OF THE EIGHTIES

THE ALTON BILL

In 1987 David Alton MP introduced an Abortion Amendment Bill. It was designed to limit the amount of time up to which a woman could gain permission to terminate a pregnancy from 28 weeks to 18 weeks. Most significantly this would have lowered the threshold to before the point at which certain tests for certain congenital disorders. The Bill failed at its third reading. There are currently moves to draw back women's rights to reproductive control in

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Northern Ireland. The precedent of Roe vs Wade has been recently overturned in the United States and MPs are currently making proposals in the UK to protect women attending medical termination clinics from being harassed.

VICTORIA GILLICK

In 1983 Victoria Gillick moved to stop flow of knowledge (and prescriptions) of contraceptives from medical professionals to young women under 16 without their parent's consent. Although initially rejected in court, in 1984 the Court of appeal ruled in agreement with Gillick which was overruled by the Lords in 1985. Girls below 16 were declared were competent to make their own decision about contraception without their parent's consent. This changed the legal notion of competence. "A competent child is one who has sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to fully understand what is proposed and also sufficient discretion to enable him or her to make a wise choice in his or her own interests". This definition of the competent child has recently been come under scrutiny again in discussions regarding young people's right to access gender affirming medical interventions.

DEPO-PROVERA

Depo-provera is an injectable hormone-based contraceptive that works for three months at a time. From 1986 concerns were raised over its link to increased likelihood of cancer, disproportional and unsafe use in the developing world and socially and economically marginalised communities in the UK. Campaigners argued that it was being used as a form of population control, at a time when encouraging barrier contraception should be a priority in the fight against HIV and AIDS. In 2005 a class action began in the United States after links between the injectable contraception and significant osteoporosis were found. In 2021 in Canada the manufacturers settled a class action related to the drug. ●

Photo by Dyet at Morguefile.com

Now That's What I Call a History of the 1980s is published 11 July via Manchester University Press

CRASH LANDING

THE PRIMITIVES

LOVELY AT 35

By Paul Browne

The latter end of the 1980s gave rise to a bewildering range of indie pop outfits, some of which managed to successfully cross over from their indie roots to become commercial bands of some success. On the one hand, you had the C86 bands (named after a classic NME compilation tape) and similar acts that were entrenched in the grassroots indie scene. On the other, a surge of guitar pop outfits troubling the charts, which included the likes of Voice Of The Beehive, The Darling Buds, Transvision Vamp and others.

Arguably, the one act to get the jump on the others was The Primitives, who managed to serve up an indie pop classic for the ages. Hailing from Coventry, The Primitives originally formed in 1984, initially consisting of Paul Court (vocals, guitar), Steve Dullaghan (bass), Peter Tweedie (drums) and Keiron McDermott (vocals). That initial incarnation was switched up when McDermott left the band and Tracy Tracy stepped into the role of lead singer in 1985. Tig Williams also took over on drums for the new line-up.

But life as an indie band could be tough in an environment in which a band could be well-loved one week and detested the next. As Paul Court told Blitzed previously, "By the end of 87 we thought it might be over for us. We'd been a fully-fledged indie band for two years but even the fanzines were starting to turn against us." The band's fortunes changed with the release of new single 'Crash' in February 1988. The dynamic, jangly charm of the song resonated with an audience who couldn't resist its guitar-infused energy and Tracy's laidback vocal delivery. There's something of a 60s girl group feel to a song that carries lyrical couplets such as "if I go around with you/You know that I get messed up too" and a fine use of "Na-Na-Na" sprinkled throughout to drive the song along (an element that their then-manager apparently tried to omit from the finished song). Subsequently, 'Crash' secured a No. 5 position in the UK singles chart.

The band still had to contend with a press that were not always on board. Record Mirror's review of 'Crash' suggested the band would be "back in indie land within six months." None of this appeared to dent the band's confidence and debut album Lovely swiftly followed their hit single. Bursting with catchy hooks and smart arrangements, Lovely demonstrated that the band were capable of crafting decent tunes time and again.

The genesis of Lovely had its roots during recording sessions at Cabin, the Coventry-based studio where the band were working with Paul Sampson, alongside Craig Leon and Mark Wallis. Craig Leon's recruitment was, in part, due to his impressive CV which included working with the likes of Ramones, Suicide, Talking Heads and Blondie. In fact, Leon had described The Primitives as "the Ronettes meets the Bobby Fuller Four", a comparison which found favour with the band.

Their debut album, which had originally been titled Everything's Shining Bright, was plotted for release on the band's own imprint Lazy (a label which at one time also featured shoegaze pioneers My Bloody Valentine). Meanwhile, taking a step up from their indie roots, the band signed to record label RCA in late 1987 which changed the landscape immediately. Despite their higher profile (and the benefits of a larger budget), the band ploughed on with sessions at Cabin as they had more faith in a familiar location.

The success of 'Crash' naturally suggested that the band might simply be destined to become a one hit wonder. As an album, Lovely could have been purely filler material encircling the hit single. But The Primitives had spent plenty of time in the trenches and had honed their joint abilities to craft engaging guitar pop. There's an upbeat, euphoric lift to the various tracks that pepper the album, with each successive song offering new sonic delights. At the same time, the band aren't afraid to experiment, such as on the dreampop appeal of 'Shadow' which adopts an Eastern sound palette with a nice use of string arrangements. Then there's the ethereal pop gem that's 'Ocean Blue', a composition that's drenched in washes of shimmering moods which sounds in part like some lost Cocteau Twins song.

The album also boasts 'Thru The Flowers', a crush pop delight with vocal melodies from Tracy that are perfectly matched with the fuzz guitar backing. Equally, the breezy speed pop of 'I'll Stick With You' is a dizzying dance joy.

Court takes on vocal duties for the tight rhythms of 'Carry Me Home' while the jaunty 'Nothing Left' throws in some nods to The Byrds in its arrangement. There's a more grounded quality to 'Run Baby Run', a composition which keeps things simpler, leaning heavily on some smart vocal harmonies. The album takes it down a gear on the more introspective 'Don't Want Anything To Change' and closes out with the rockabilly licks of 'Buzz Buzz Buzz'.

The Smash Hits review of the album at the time gave it a 7 out of 10 rating, adding "By no means a classic, but still a breath of fresh air in a world running short of decent groups..." Lovely managed an impressive No. 6 in the UK charts.

"We weren't really tied in with any specific musical movement" recalls Court, "although the music press did their best to pigeonhole us with other bands, and we weren't interested in sounding modern. We could have just as easily existed in 1968 or 78."

There's certainly a timeless appeal to Lovely with its catchy melodies, dreamy pop and joyous guitar rhythms. The album remains an underappreciated gem in the indie pop landscape that marked it out as a classic of 1988, yet also retains its power in 2023. ●

A 2CD edition of Lovely is available via Cherry Red

BLITZED REVIEWS

MIKE OLDFIELD

MIKE OLDFIELD / Tubular Bells (50th Anniversary Edition)

By Imogen Bebb

If you'd tuned into BBC Radio One at some point on the evening of 29th May 1973, you would probably have found yourself listening to a progressive rock radio show called Top Gear. You would probably also have heard the show's presenter, John Peel, waxing lyrical in his signature dulcet tones about an album that had been released just four days previously. "[Tubular Bells is] one of the most impressive LPs I've ever had the chance to play on the radio, really a remarkable record", Peel generously declared, also going on to describe it as "a new recording of such strength and beauty that to me it represents the first break-through into history that any musician has made" in The Listener magazine the following week.

The album in question that Peel was so excited about was Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells, and although it took a few months for the rest of the country to catch up with the DJ's enthusiasm (the record sold slowly at first but took off in the UK after the opening piano motif was used as the theme to the controversial 1973 horror film The Exorcist), Peel was right. The release of Tubular Bells was a moment for the history books, and in fact there was very little about it or its creation that wasn't impressive or remarkable, from the fact Oldfield was just 19 when he composed the album (he also played nearly every instrument on the recording) to the way it set a new standard for British progressive music.

As one might expect from an album of such iconic status, over the years Tubular Bells has been made subject to a long list of reissues and rereleases, including (but not limited to) an orchestral version, a re-recorded version, two follow-up albums and a slew of remasters. This 50th anniversary reissue is the latest (but probably not the last) addition to that long list, and sadly it does very little in the way of celebrating this marvelous album, despite the fact it was overseen by Oldfield himself.

Admittedly, there is one new track - 'Tubular Bells 4 Intro', an unreleased demo from 2018 which was supposedly intended to be the first piece from (yet another) new version of the work - and it will certainly be an experience to hear the half-speed Abbey Road master that will feature on the LP version of this release.

Aside from that, however, at most this 50th anniversary edition is nothing more than a compilation, bringing together tracks that have already been released elsewhere (such as 'Tubular X', Oldfield's take on the X-Files theme, and 'Tubular Bells/In Dulci Jubilo' which featured in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games) and lumping them in with the original album, reducing its impact and cheapening it as a result.

Now please don't mistake this writer's lack of enthusiasm for this reissue as a lack of enthusiasm for Mike Oldfield's work in general; Oldfield is a musical genius and one of the greatest composers this country has ever seen, and Tubular Bells was a bold, fearless and pioneering work when it was released in 1973.

Sadly, though, this reissue is none of those things.

Want my advice? Get yourself a 1973 copy of Tubular Bells on vinyl and play it - loudly. Listen to the record's two glorious tracks, soak up the way they move, their spellbinding melodies, their freaky time signatures, and then take a second to remember that it all came from the head of a 19-year-old who got kicked out of the band at Shaftesbury Theatre because he kept playing his guitar solo in 7/8 time. ●

Tubular Bells 50th anniversary edition is out now via UMR/EMI

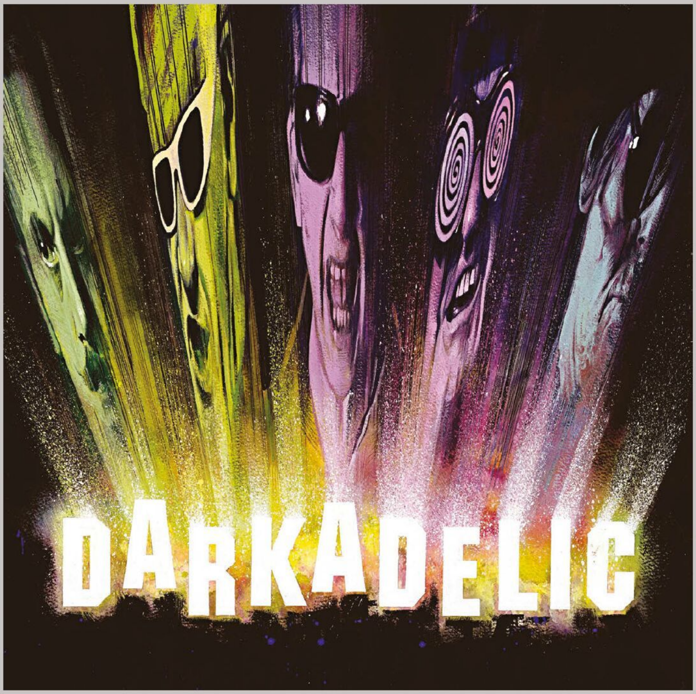
BLITZED REVIEWS

THE DAMNED

THE DAMNED/ *Darkadelic*

By Mik Scarlet

The Damned hold a special place in my heart. Punk happened when I was 10 and while I loved the style and look (as anyone who has seen me will know) but I never really got the music. Either too amateurish or too polished and usually shouty, but The Damned I loved. I can still remember pogoing to 'Love Song' and 'Smash It Up' at teenage parties and school discos and ever since they've been my punk band of choice. I wasn't so into the Goth phase and once had Captain Sensible stop a gig at The Point in Milton Keynes to threaten my gang as we ripped the piss out of him as he performed the 'Happy Talk' phase, but otherwise I dig The Damned.



Darkadelic doesn't let you down. Kicks off with a stomper 'The Invisible Man', and then 'Bad Weather Girl' channels everything that made The Damned a great punk band. Catchy choruses, driving guitars and clever lyrics. Already I can feel the teenage pogo rising up inside me. It's clever musically too. Edgy as all punk should be, but also musically intelligent. 'You're Gonna Realise' carries on the riot but with a melodic edge, the pace rising and falling like a soaring bird. 'Beware Of The Clown' grabs you by the collar and pulls you off on a journey of Damned perfection. This track is the most Damned so far, and I'm fast becoming the teenage Mik dressed in my bondage trouser made by my mum, pogoing at Paul O'Sullivan's party and landing on a coffee table, smashing into the jaw of Julie Potter and knocking her out cold. There went my chances with her! It's like The Damned have created a musical time machine and we're all onboard, like a spiky haired Dr Who companion. This is my first listen and I'm falling for Darkadelic big time.

The pace slows with 'Western Promise', a bigger sounding track that feels like the uplifting track from the end of an amazing action film, or the track used as the heroic couple drive across the American west in an open top Cadillac, ill-gotten gains flying in the winds as they laugh together. Big and beautiful. Also very Doors like in its feel. I likey. 'Wake The Dead' hits you like a shovel after that, but still epic in its feel. This is the epic section obviously, where they mix the punk with the big goth phase influences. It really works, despite my feelings about the earlier goth period. Might have to go back and relisten eh? Dave Vanian has one of the best voices ever, and this track really allows him to show his chops. Like a punk Matt Monroe, his voice is rich like treacle, warm like toast and powerful like a lion. That voice has always made The Damned stand out in the punk world. Hmmm, I love it.

'Follow Me' returns to a punkier feel, with heavy blues influences. Very rockabilly too. They've thrown every influence into Darkadelic and made something rather special. 'Motorcycle Man' is fast, fast, fast, and again feels very Doors influenced. I usually can't take a whole album of punk but The Damned have me and I'm enthused to know where we're going next. 'Girl I'll Stop At Nothing' has more of an old school Damned feel, less produced but still as driving and singalong. 'The Leader Of The Gang' carries on the feel of 'GISAN'. A more Motown punk feel, but oh so catchy and uplifting. 'From Your Lips' goes full Doors, and could honestly be a Doors track, which in my book is no bad thing, while being purely The Damned. Great chorus too. Wowzers, this is a great album.

And then it's the last track, 'Roderick'. What do you do to finish an album? Go full Hammer Horror obviously! The Damned go to that place that they do so well, creating a horror movie in musical form with 'Roderick' and it is beautiful. Spooky, freaky and punky. What a way to sign off!

Darkadelic is a joy to behold and is a must have. I feel a session of playing my Damned back catalogue coming on big time. But first to the record store...I need this LP and I need it now! ●

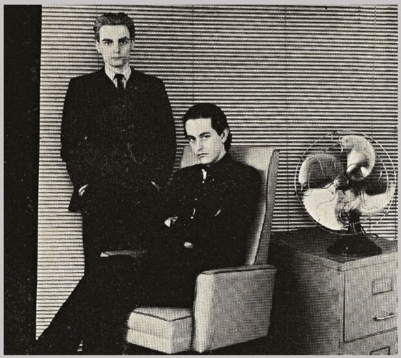
BLITZED REVIEWS

B.E.F.

B.E.F. / *Music For Stowaways*

By Mik Scarlet

I truly think that Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh are geniuses and the first two Human League albums are two of the most important albums ever released. The passion and anger of these two creative titans that fuelled the B.E.F. after the split of the Human League is there to be heard on Music For Stowaways.



The British Electric Foundation was born from the ashes of the old Human League and I must admit, due to this recording originally only being released on cassette I have never heard it. It's a revelation. I've always had a soft spot for the instrumental tracks of the League and Music For Stowaways takes them a step further.

The first track, the 'BEF Ident' has been the intro to live Heaven 17 gigs, and then we go off into 'The Optimum Chant' and 'Uptown Apocalypse', two wonderful experimental musical numbers that take the instrumentals of Travelogue and Reproduction to a new level of weirdness. 'Wipe The Board Clean' has a much more Human League feel, with a pop sensibility mixed with a synth freak out feel that marked both the Human League and Heaven 17's early work. Then the masterpiece that is 'Groove Thang' gets funky, and you hear the future for Ware and Marsh. This instrumental version really grooves baby. 'Music To Kill Your Parents By' is as weird and unnerving as you would expect from the title. 'The Old At Rest' is haunting and sparse, with an ethereal feel. 'The Rise Of The East' starts with a Jupiter 4 random arpeggio and so of course I love it. Perfect slice of synth noodling, especially with the playing around with triggering that hits halfway through. 'Decline Of The West' follows perfectly from 'TROTE' as a counterpoint, sadder, more melodic with a dark undertone. 'A Baby Called Billy' is weird, weird, weird. Playing around with rhythms it's a noise fest of fun. The album ends with 'Honeymoon In New York', a fast-paced disjoined percussion experiment that unnerves, before returning the 'BEF Ident' to end.

A wonderful slice of synth history and one I am very happy to have finally heard. It's not going to get the dance floor going but as a testament to the talents of Ware and Marsh it's a doozy of a re-release. A must own for any self-respecting synth musician or fan of electronic music. ●

Out now
https://coldspring.co.uk/csr310lp

BLITZED REVIEWS

STEVEN JONES & LOGAN SKY

STEVEN JONES & LOGAN SKY/ *Sacred Figures*

By Paul Browne

The musical partnership between Steven Jones and Logan Sky has its roots in a shared history with the legendary Steve Strange. That fortuitous moment has resulted in a clutch of albums and EPs, which includes 2017 release Corrupt State, an album that also featured Steve Strange on the title track (the last track that he wrote before his untimely death in February 2015) as well as their 2021 album European Lovers.

Sacred Figures represents the sixth album from Steven Jones and Logan Sky, featuring a collection of songs that at times are tinged with a certain melancholic quality and at others, an uplifting essence. The tracks here present themes that touch on ideas about faith, belief and the concept of veneration. The result of this is often a sense of ritual; an atmosphere that might invoke the idea of a temple or shrine. The darker elements of the album lean towards an introspective mood, particularly with Steven Jones opting for spoken word segments, which tends to lend more weight to some of the lyrical narratives.

All of this might suggest that Sacred Figures, as an album, is a dour experience, but the more melancholic qualities of the album are balanced by a shrewd use of rhythm and melody as an equally important component. This is typified by the groove of the opening number 'Come Back Tonight' or the sweeping glory of 'Dharma Wanderers'.

Then there's the lush beauty of 'This Silence, Our Tragedy', a track which seems reminiscent of Roxy Music in places; a stylish, lounge pop offering with smooth synth washes augmented by some sweet sax flourishes.

There's a more sedate approach on the hymnal 'Thalia's Room' with the solemnity of the vocal delivery taking on a hypnotic aspect. While the blocky rhythms and introspective musings of 'Into Dust' suggest early The The.

By contrast, the album's title track is hewn from a more classic coldwave template. Brooding synths wash in and out with some minimalist percussion. The stark spoken word delivery by Steven Jones reinforces the themes of ritual and process, while lines such as "Sacred figures, you don't speak to me when I pray" have a strangely affecting power to them.

Similarly, 'Kabbalistic' plays around with the darker end of electronic music as its foundation, but the song opens up with some smart melodic structures and slow percussive rhythms. It's also one of the many highlights on the album.

'This Intensity', meanwhile, is described as a song that "crystallises the subconscious yearning to escape a landscape of illusion and embrace undeniable reality." In practice, it's a lush, meditative composition with burbling rhythms which plays around with ambient elements.

The album's longest track appears via the kaleidoscopic patterns of 'Burn It Down'. It's an immersive affair with warm synths layered on top of each other. It's also another track that features some exquisite sax wrapped into the mix.

There's a more unsettling air to 'Radiation', a number that relies on its looming synth soundscapes to induce a sense of doubt and uncertainty.

The appeal of Sacred Figures is also enhanced by a number of guest performers. This includes guitar contributions from Jan Linton (known for his collaborations with Richard Barbieri and John Taylor) and the sax is provided by Gary Barnacle (who has previously worked with the likes of Soft Cell, Visage and David Bowie among others).

This latest offering from Jones and Sky is not an album that elicits easy categorisation, easily slipping past tags such as synth-pop or dark wave. Instead, Sacred Figures is a haunting, evocative electronic journey that also asks deeper questions about the human condition. ●

Sacred Figures is released 23 June via Etrangers Musique

BLITZED REVIEWS

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES / *Culture Bunker 1978-82*

By Paul Browne

The Liverpool music scene of the late 1970s proved to be a feverish crucible, hammering out a seemingly endless line of bands that each had their own distinctive appeal. This included the likes of Echo And The Bunnymen, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, OMD and Dead or Alive among others.

Included in that mix, the psychedelic pop of The Teardrop Explodes was predicted to be the next big thing. With the flamboyant Julian Cope as frontman as well as some memorable songs, it certainly seemed as if fortune would favour Liverpool's ascendent stars.

Originally, The Teardrop Explodes had coalesced after a number of false starts, which included the legendary Crucial Three (a proto band featuring Cope, Ian McCulloch and Pete Wylie). The first Teardrop Explodes incarnation was formed around Julian Cope, Paul Simpson, Mick Finkler and Gary Dwyer, taking their name from a dramatic panel in a Marvel comic. Signed to the Zoo Records label, the Teardrops achieved critical acclaim on the back of mesmerising debut single 'Sleeping Gas'.

Yet the release of 1980 debut album Kilimanjaro drew mixed reviews. In Sounds, Dave McCullough was clearly a champion for the band, but summed up the album as "a record that falls between two stools neither or which have enough legs to stand-up." Subsequent singles were hardly making a dent in the charts either.

But the band's trajectory would be given a boost on the back of anthemic 1981 single 'Reward'. The brass-fuelled pop single delivered their first chart hit and turned them into pop stars. Although this success kept them afloat for a period, the band came slightly unstuck by the time of their second album Wilder, which flopped in a dramatic fashion (despite showcasing some fine songs and a clear maturity in the Teardrop's sound).

Adding to their woes, there was dissension and line-up changes, hardly helped by drugs and arguments about the band's direction. This anarchic nature meant that by the time the band had embarked on sessions for the planned third album, they had exploded for real.

"The Teardrop Explodes was more and more like an old B17 bomber every day" Cope later commented in his book Head-On, "Half of the crew and the engines were gone and the man in control had an almost kamikaze attitude towards landing."

Culture Bunker 1978-82, a new extensive box set (in both vinyl and CD flavours), attempts to reassess the legacy of The Teardrop Explodes with all their single releases present and correct, but with a ton of other rare material thrown into the mix as well. The collection also features a book which includes an insightful essay by long-time Cope cohort Mick Houghton on the band's history. The essay is also a useful primer for exploring the Liverpool music scene of the 1970s and the rise of the legendary Eric's Club, all of which provides essential background detail for the Teardrops.

Perhaps part of the challenge with this collection is that much of the catalogue of The Teardrop Explodes has previously been reissued at various points since their demise. This includes Julian Cope's own 2007 Zoology compilation, which featured some choice rarities.

Speaking about the aim of Culture

Bunker, Mick Houghton has stated that the project was designed "to present an alternative to the familiar, existing Teardrop Explodes catalogue". Certainly, one thing that this collection does well is to demonstrate the band's evolution, from the raw punk ethic they employed for early live shows, through to the more introspective, baroque pop approach of the final days.

The box set is helpfully arranged into six volumes that roughly map out the chronology of the band via single releases, live recordings, demos and alternative versions. For those aficionados who are singles purists, then volumes one and two offer up a complete set of the Teardrop's various single releases and relevant B-sides.

It's on volume three that things get interesting for the diehard fan. Titled From Drug Puritan To Acid King, it offers an opportunity to hear the fledgling Teardrops honing their sound in a live environment with tracks taken from various 1979 gigs. These live performances also feature previously unreleased tracks, including 'Straight Rain' and 'Beauty Comes Second' among others.

Volume four, The Great Dominions, shows how far the band's sound has changed by 1981/82 and the contrast is remarkable. The previous punk elements that the band were employing live are wisely pruned. Here, the Teardrops are sounding more melodic, more dynamic, yet also willing to push the envelope by crafting moodier, contemplative moments. Tracks such as 'Tiny Children' and 'The Great Dominions' offer up lyrical narratives that are at once cryptic, yet also have a romantic element that sets the band apart from many of their contemporaries.

The final volume (amusingly titled Death Rattle) features an assorted number of demos and oddities that, in part, showcase the aborted third album sessions. There are some welcome moments here, such as the inclusion of the original brooding version of 'You Disappear From View', the baroque pop of 'Log Cabin' and lost classic 'Buchanan' (here titled 'Icarus#1'). There's also an excerpt from 'Flipped Out On LSD' which seems overdue (and features a rare Dave Balfe vocal). However, much of the tracks here are raw demos with lengthy instrumentals which are intriguing to hear once but are unlikely to be repeat players. As a result, this volume feels a little underwhelming.

But there are plenty of gems to pick over from the material available on Culture Bunker as a whole. This includes the exquisite baroque version of 'Suffocate', a touching stripped-down 'Falling Down Around Me' and a hymnal version of 'Not My Only Friend'. There's even an early instrumental demo of later solo Cope classic 'World Shut Your Mouth'.

The final days of the Teardrops were marked by arguments over songwriting roles, looming debts and disastrous third album sessions, which included members of the band being chased by shotgun over the Monmouthshire countryside. In many ways, this was perfectly in-step with the chaotic nature of the band. Equally, Culture Bunker isn't a perfect collection of songs, but it does help to showcase the glorious life of The Teardrop Explodes. ●

Culture Bunker 1978-82 is out now via Universal Music Recordings

BLITZED REVIEWS

SOFT CELL

SOFT CELL / *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret and Other Stories Live*

By Mik Scarlet

There are many gigs in life you just know are too good to miss. For me it was seeing OMD when 'Enola Gay' hit the top ten, which was my first real gig. Then seeing Gary Numan's farewell at Wembley and his recent appearance there again. Depeche Mode playing Wembley when they first got huge were all stunning gigs but the one that got away was seeing Soft Cell live. When they announced they were playing the O2 we were there, and then couldn't miss the Hammersmith Odeon (OK, Eventim Apollo) gigs. If you weren't lucky enough to be there, or want to relive this amazing concert, you can now experience the joy of Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret and other stories live on CD, DVD and Blu-ray.

While the O2 gig was huge, the Hammersmith show was more intimate and this really worked for Soft Cell. From the moment 'Torch' kicks off proceedings, I'm back, a surly teenager, dressed in black shouting "you don't understand me" at my parents as I slam the door to go out with my weird mates, caked in black eyeliner, black leather and spiked mop of hair. It's funny how important Soft Cell were to so many of us disaffected youths back then. This live gig, celebrating 40 years since Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret's release places this importance front and centre with the string of classic synthpop sleaze. Mixed in with tracks from over the years, as each plays out they all carry the legacy of Soft Cell. With the older tracks being remade with newer technology, they become a body of work that charts a journey while all being of one, the wonderful mixture of Marc's lyrics and vocals with Dave's synthetic mastery.

Broken into two acts, the first spans the years after Non-Stop, the second is recreation of the album's tracklist in all its ground-breaking glory. When I was at the gig I was desperate for the NSEC section to start, but being able to go back I'm loving the tracks from the newer releases and how they work so well live. As I said, everything ties together so well from the 80s, to the 00s to today, the production of the live show creates a flow and uniformity that paints a picture of why Soft Cell were and are so important to the electronic music scene.

At this point I have to admit that I would probably buy the live music release rather than the video. It's great and very well produced, but it doesn't capture the experience of being there. The staging was amazing with huge screens that played all manner of videos that accompanied the tracks. You get glimpses of this when the performance goes to a wide shot, but mostly we see close ups of Marc, Dave and the live band. This is the standard format of a live performance video, and it's really well done. It just misses something that you got when you were in the room. But I know, from my wife buying everything that Marc releases that for many of you that won't matter one bit.

Act 1, the music from after NSEC is great, both the newer tracks and the classics, with the crowd going wild for the latter. Especially 'Kitchen Sink Drama', 'Where The Heart Is' and 'Martin'. 'The Art Of Falling Apart' lifts the lid off the Apollo, but the audience all know why they're there. Time for Act 2, time to experience something that so few did the first time around. Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret live.... and this time in its entirety! As the Fru, Fru, Fru's of 'Frustration' begin, a cry

from the crowd goes out and we're all teenagers again. Watching it on video, I'm back there, back fighting tears of joy and nostalgia. 'Tainted Love' next, a song Marc does at every concert but here it's with Dave as it should be. The crowd goes wild as expected. 'Seedy Films' remind us all of why Soft Cell shocked so many, with their exploration of the darker side of life. Every track is an amazing reproduction of the original album but with the joy of a live performance. I seem to remember the audience singing along more, but as the sound on this release is second to none, I expect that was faded out in the mix. As I did when I saw them, I feel the tears welling again as 'Youth' starts. To think when I first heard this I could never imagine listening to Soft Cell play it live when it was so much more relevant, when my youth truly had gone. Even more stunning to think that Marc wrote this when he was so young too. A sign of genius for sure. On this track Marc leads the audience to join in, as most of them were feeling as I was, joy and sadness. A classic. From the sublime to well, pure filth, with 'Sex Dwarf'. How many hours spent dancing to this in goth clubs eh? Again, Marc leads the crowd as they scream along. Loving the whipping sounds added to the backing tracks too. You can feel the band feeding off the audience too. The video really captures this. 'Entertain Me' maintains the passion, 'Chips On My Shoulder' is wonderful and then we hit one of favourite tracks of all time, 'Bedsitter'. Oh, the joy. The 12-inch mix too. Woohoo. One because it's so good, the other because it's nearly time for 'Say Hello, Wave Goodbye'. Always a highlight of any Marc Almond gig. But don't get ahead of yourself Mik. As the show goes on you truly experience the skill of Marc and Dave to create something that worked so well, was so unlike anything to have come before and that would stand the test of time. 'Secret Life' sleazes by and we hit 'Say Hello'. The crowd knows what's coming and they let us know. One band, one album, so many amazing tracks. Arh, the memories of local discos, filled with disco dollies, cowering with fear of attack from the football casuals. 'Say Hello' always takes me back to the Tropicana Beach in Luton. The gig ended here, with 'Purple Zone' and 'Memorabilia' as encores, but in video world they continue on so you miss the waves of adoration but what way to end. Something new, something old.

What a gig, what a live album, what a live video. It has its flaws, but it's a great testament to one of the great bands of the 80s. I had to watch on a review link to a website, so I've put my order in now. Just a joy. ●

BLITZED REVIEWS
DRIVING TO DAMASCUS

DRIVING TO DAMASCUS / *Big Country*

By Imogen Bebb

Big Country first hit the UK music scene in 1982, wielding their rather marvelous brand of brash, energetic, often anthemic rock music.

The band went on to have numerous hits throughout the '80s and into the '90s with tracks like 'In A Big Country' (1983), 'Look Away' (1986), 'King of Emotion' (1988) and 'Alone' (1993), mellowing less than one might expect as their career progressed and always managing to maintain elements of that typical Big Country sound.

By early 1999 the band had released seven studio albums and were in the process of recording their eighth in Wales' legendary Rockfield Studios. This album would eventually be titled Driving To Damascus, and now 24 years later it's seeing a reissue as a deluxe 4CD box set comprising the original album, B-sides and alternate mixes, two discs of demos, and sleeve notes by the band's manager at the time, Ian Grant, who reportedly gives a "personal insight into the album's genesis".

But before we even get started on the music, there's something specific about the history of this album that every listener should know - it was vocalist Stuart Adamson's last album with the band before he sadly took his own life in 2001.

This might lead you to believe that Driving To Damascus is sad, melancholy or at the very least introspective, but in all honesty it's very rarely any of these things. In fact, you could say it was the most powerful, upbeat, extroverted album Big Country had released for a number of years, and as such it's one of the strongest works put out by the classic line-up (which also featured Bruce Watson on guitar, Tony Butler on bass and Mark Brzezicki on drums).

Take the title track, which also opens

the album, which announces its arrival with a pealing guitar riff that descends into feedback noise backed up by a second, more rhythmic guitar line and a clattering of drums. 'The President Slipped And Fell' takes a similar approach but with the added colour of a rock'n'roll-esque vocal line, whilst 'Devil In The Eye' is all about the chorus harmonies and fuzzy Britpop guitars. On the lyrics front it's 'See You' that really shines, ditching the cheesy eagerness one might expect from storytelling love songs, and instead serving up nuggets of wisdom about relationships that a lot of people will likely find themselves relating to.

There are a few moments of note elsewhere in the set, although it's the original studio album that's the obvious highlight; 'John Wayne's Dream' (the title under which the album was released in the US) on disc two complements the studio album well with its wash of gritty guitars and genuinely memorable chorus, whilst the alternative mix of 'This Blood's For You' on disc four has a heavy country feel, something which clearly suited the band's musical leanings at the time.

Overall, if you can cope with finding yourself constantly wondering why on earth Cherry Red didn't wait one more year and release it as a 25th anniversary edition, this set would make a worthwhile addition to any early '80s or Scottish rock fan's collection. It also perhaps serves as a reminder that much of Big Country's music - even that which was released after what could be considered their 'heyday' - possesses a sense of longevity and persistent endurance that a great deal of music released by some of their contemporaries does not.

Big Country: Driving To Damascus, 4CD Deluxe Edition is released 30 June 2023 via Cherry Red

BLITZED REVIEWS

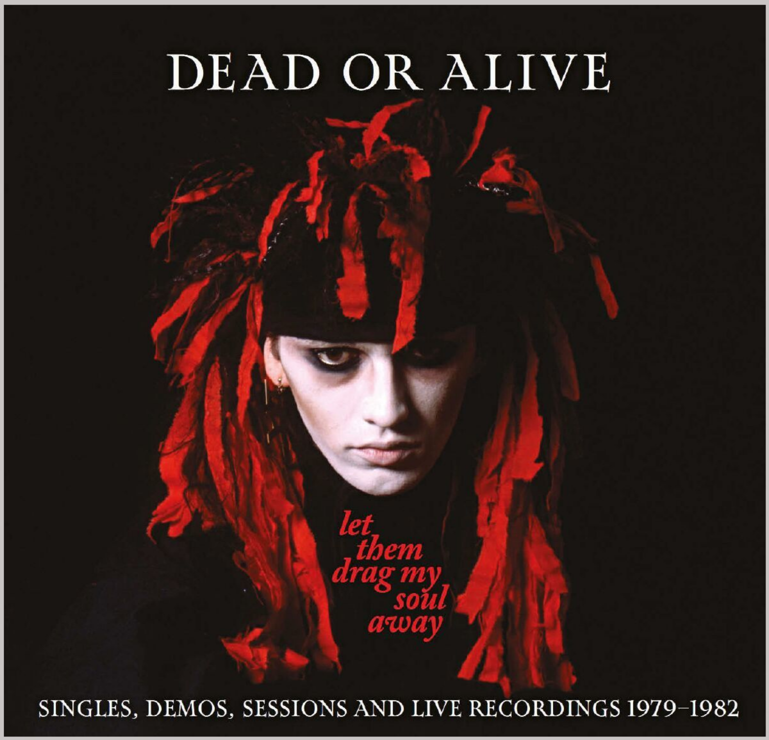
DEAD OR ALIVE

DEAD OR ALIVE / Let Them Drag My Soul Away – Singles, Demos and Live Recordings 1979-1982

By Mik Scarlet

Ah, Dead Or Alive. I soo soo loved Dead Or Alive. Sophisticated Boom Boom was a stonker of an album and seeing them live on the tour was life changing. Youthquake took them to superstardom, gave us 'You Spin Me' and the beginning of the rule of Stock Aitken and Waterman. But before this, there was Nightmares In Wax, Black Leather and the originators of Goth. Let Them Drag My Soul Away brings this era and lifts the lid on the birth of what became a global phenomenon. I had to review this album...

This 3CD compilation charts the releases and demos of Nightmares In Wax and early Dead Or Alive, with CD1 being the single releases, CD2 are demos and the third mixes Peel sessions and live recordings, all in a lovely box with an information packed booklet. As CD1 kicks off, I'm taken back to my days on the dancefloor of The Gathering in my hometown of Luton, as we chanted "Black Leather" along with Nightmares On Wax. So good to hear it again but remastered and not drunk on snakebite and black. In fact, it's so good to hear the proto-Goth of NOW as each track plays, especially the 1985 remixes of 'Girl Song' and 'Shangri-La'. Then the change happens to early Dead Or Alive and the proto-Goth really kicks in with 'I'm Falling' and 'Flowers'. DOA are never really credited with being Goth originators, but the input of Wayne Hussey is palpable. Pete Burns' voice is wonderful to behold on these early tracks, with his voice and Hussey's guitar leading the way for a whole movement. 'Number Eleven' is stunning and perfect for war dancing to. I'd really forgotten how much the goth movement owed Dead Or Alive but each track has spawned a thousand goth numbers over the years. 'Nowhere to Nowhere' captures where The Cure would go. The second version of 'It's Been Hours Now' and 'Some Of That' chart the beginning of the move to the sound of Sophisticated Boom Boom. What's next with the demos?



CD2 has four Nightmares On Wax demos, all of which are so close to the releases despite being 4 track recordings. In fact, I like them more than the singles. Then on to Dead Or Alive... Hmm? The demos feature tracks like 'Far Too Hard' and the wonderful 'Misty Circles', and you hear the beginnings of Boom Boom and Youthquake. They are of a very high quality for demos too. The myth is the DOA relied on producers to make their sound but this CD puts that myth firmly to bed. I actually prefer this version of 'Misty Circles' and the charmingly empty 'What I Want' is a joy to behold. The last three tracks on CD2 are musical numbers that demonstrate the move to a more electronic disco/club influenced sound. Very interesting and I would have loved to have heard what Burns would have put to them.

CD3 kicks off with the goth sound, 'Nowhere to Nowhere' as a Peel session. All of the early singles feature highlighting if it was needed just how ahead of the curve John Peel always was. I've never heard the versions of 'Misty Circles', being a mid-way point between the goth phase and the disco phase of Dead Or Alive. This CD closes with two live DOA tracks and a TV recording of NOW 'Flowers', which is superb.

As a lifelong fan of Dead Or Alive, this is a fantastic addition to my collection. A real window on the birth of a band that was so much more influential than is ever mentioned. Now go away and let me play it again. ●

Let Them Drag My Soul Away is out 22 July on Cherry Red

BLITZED REVIEWS

PET SHOP BOYS

PET SHOP BOYS / *Smash – The Singles 1985-2020*

By Barry Page

In one of the greatest examples of happenstance since a doe-eyed Paul McCartney first clapped eyes on a check-shirted John Lennon at a church fete in 1957, Chris Lowe and Neil Tennant randomly met at a hi-fi shop on the Kings Road in affluent Chelsea in August 1981, and soon bonded over a shared love of Bowie and electro-pop.

Back then, keyboardist Lowe was an apprentice architect, while ITV Books employee and aspiring songwriter Tennant was on the cusp of landing a job as a features writer and reviewer – and later assistant editor to David Hepworth – at Smash Hits, the premier pop publication of the day, whose fortnightly circulation would later peak at an impressive million copies. Evincing the biweekly magazine's signature wit and mischief that would later manifest itself in much of Pet Shop Boys' material, Tennant fitted right in, famously asking questions such as 'Does your mother golf?', as well as coming up with memorable catchphrases such as 'Down the dumper'.

While Hepworth likened the magazine office space to a school-like environment, for Tennant it was more like a pop star training camp, a place where he could gradually formulate an ethos for the erudite duo, whose humour and intelligence would both play a key role in their future success. While their lyrical melting pot of social commentary, politics, melancholy and wit would make them stand out from the crowd, in terms of their visual aesthetic, they were determined not to emulate many of the stars who graced the pages of the magazine. Tennant later told Mojo: "We were very concerned from the beginning about our visual presentation, full stop; we weren't going to present ourselves as being pop stars of the Duran/Culture Club mode because it's not what we're like anyway."

Originally called West End, they renamed themselves Pet Shop Boys in tribute to friends who owned a pet shop in nearby Ealing. They received their first big break in August 1983 when Tennant was assigned to interview fellow Geordie Sting in New York, where The Police were on the US leg of their Synchronicity world tour. During downtime in the Big Apple, Tennant hooked up with pioneering hi-NRG producer Bobby Orlando, whose own records had reportedly graced the dumper bins at Smash Hits. He agreed to produce the fledgling act, who soon cut a brace of singles for his Bobcat label, plus a number of unreleased tracks (some of which would eventually be reworked).

Debut single 'West End Girls' certainly gained some commercial traction in France and Belgium in 1984, but it wasn't until they'd signed with music mogul Tom Watkins that the duo were able to quit their day jobs.

Upon severing ties with Orlando, they signed with Parlophone, who released yuppy-baiting single 'Opportunities (Let's Make Lots Of Money)' in the summer of 1985, but it was a dynamic new version of West End Girls, cut with hotshot producer Stephen Hague, that provided the commercial breakthrough, eventually topping the charts on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite their fears of going 'down the dumper' themselves after follow-up 'Loves Come Quickly' stalled at a disappointing No. 19, the duo got back on track with a revamped 'Opportunities' (UK No. 11) and

'Suburbia' (UK No. 8), and their career has since gone from strength to strength. In addition to their seismic achievements in the hit parade, with stats revealing a tally of over forty Top 40 hits (including four chart-toppers), the duo have dabbled in soundtrack and theatre work, and collaborated with a huge number of acts, including Bowie, Boy George, Electronic, Kylie, Liza Minnelli, Dusty Springfield, Tina Turner and Robbie Williams.

At 63 and 68, respectively, Lowe and Tennant are now the veritable elder statesmen of the electro-pop world – though still very much the pop kids at heart – and, whilst we await their new, James Ford-helmed 15th studio album, there's a weighty new retrospective to enjoy in Smash, which was borne of a request for a rerelease of the vinyl version of out-of-print 1991 compilation Discography. Messrs Lowe and Tennant then suggested extending it to include every single they've released.

With a title that alludes to both the Boys' chart prowess and Tennant's journalistic past, Smash boasts 55 newly-remastered singles – sequenced chronologically and in the correct radio versions – and arrives in a number of lavish formats, all including an illustrated booklet penned by PSB acolyte and former Smash Hits writer Chris Heath. For the more deep-pocketed purchasers, there are twelve sides of needle-dropping delights to enjoy in the weighty vinyl version, while there's a 3CD and 3CD/2Blu-ray edition to consider. But, which do you choose, the hard or soft option?

As has been well documented, this new anthology isn't quite the one-stop shop for all your singular PSB needs, and there are some notable omissions. Since the first third of the set is a straight rerelease of Discography, there is still no room for the original mix of 'Opportunities' nor the Brothers In Rhythm mix of 'How Can You Expect To Be Taken Seriously?', while those expecting the early Bobby O singles – which also weren't included on the 'Further Listening' edition of debut album Please – will be disappointed. Likewise, there's no room for the eponymous 'Absolutely Fabulous' hit, nor recent singles like 'Burning The Heather'. However, many of the missing tracks do appear on the 3CD/2Blu-ray edition, which rounds up all of the duo's promo clips, though at a considerably higher price point.

Explaining the album sequencing process on social media, the Boys' team commented: "In recent years the idea of a 'single' has become slightly vague with tracks serviced to radio and online but not physically released. The singles compiled on Smash (from 'Suburbia' onwards) were all officially released on CD in the UK. Where there is a double A-side or an EP, only the lead track which got radio plays has been included."

Of course, the focus should be on what's on Smash, rather than what isn't. It's fair to say the tracks on CD1 remain the benchmark of the duo's recording career, but that's not to say the quality ends there. As 2003's dual-themed PopArt retrospective confirmed, they successfully navigated their way through the Nineties, hitting a new commercial peak with their hit-stuffed, chart-topping album Very, which included their superlative cover of Village People classic 'Go West', an iconic song that's as synonymous with the duo as both 'West End Girls' and 'It's A Sin', and whose melody can regularly be heard ringing out on the football terraces.

Moving on from their pointy-hatted phase, follow-up album Bilingual enjoyed plenty of success in the midst of Britpop, and exhibited a strong Latin American influence with its tribal rhythms and use of Spanish/Portuguese lyrics, as evidenced by the singles 'Se a vida é (That's the Way Life Is)' and 'Single-Bilingual'. By the end of the Nineties, they were still chart regulars, notching up a handful of hits, including a hi-NRG makeover of West Side Story classic 'Somewhere', and an unashamed disco pastiche in 'New York City Boy'.

The duo were slightly less successful when exploring a more organic sound on 2002's Release, but returned to form with 2006's Trevor Horn-produced Fundamental, which included politically-charged single 'I'm With Stupid', an amusing commentary on the relationships of political leaders that still resonates today, proof-positive they still have plenty to say in the 21st century.

By 2009's hugely underrated Yes, the duo were unfairly being accused of being on auto-pilot, but gained plenty of plaudits with their recent trilogy of Stuart Price-produced albums – Electric, Super and Hotspot – with modern PSB classics like 'Love Is A Bourgeois Construct' affirming they've lost none of their humour and bombast. And, despite streaming and downloading altering the music industry inexorably, the good old-fashioned single still means plenty to the duo, who admirably continue to make physical product available to their fans.

In a career that's rarely been allowed to stagnate thanks to a chameleonic drive and strong work ethic, Smash stands as a glowing testament to a hugely innovative act who have delivered some of the finest pop music of the last 40 years. In fact, you could say they've smashed it. ●

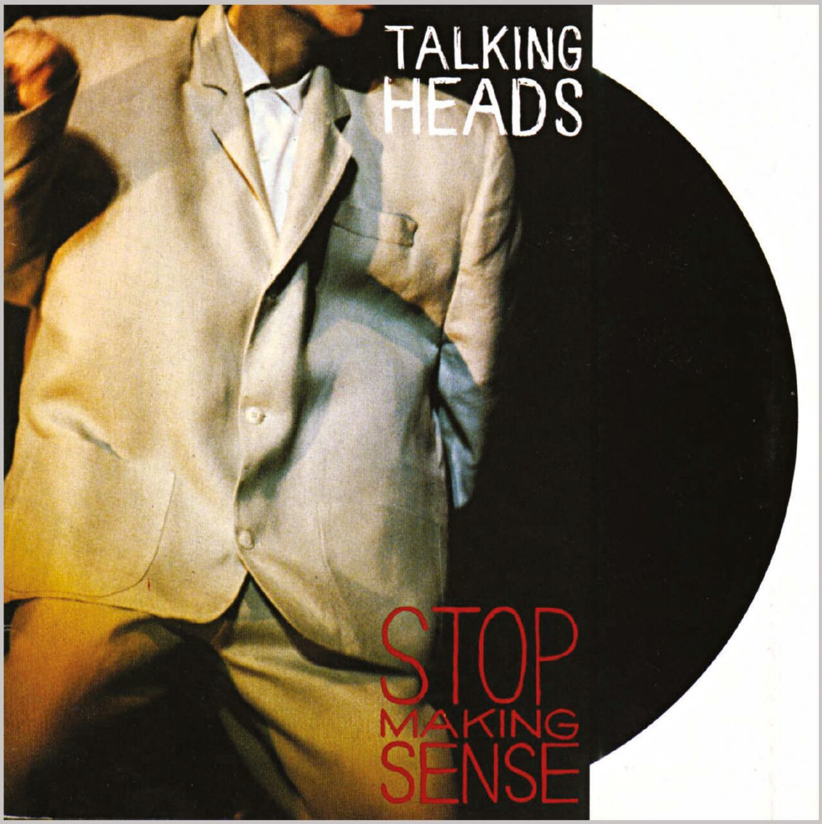
Smash - The Singles 1985-2020 is out now

BLITZED REVIEWS

TALKING HEADS

TALKING HEADS / *Stop Making Sense*

By Martin James



So starts a lone David Byrne stands before a full auditorium on a stage stripped of backdrops, equipment or any semblance of concert paraphernalia. Just the high priest of the geek chic, a boombox and an acoustic guitar running through Psycho Killer', that iconic punk-funk bassline removed in favour of Byrnes high speed strumming and chopping.

"I can't seem to face up to the facts, I'm tense and nervous and I can't relax" he yelps as a crowd might have experienced the collected feeling of mild disappointment that this show might just be the equivalent of Byrne's open mic night. Just him, a guitar and a boombox. How much were the tickets?

The answer to that question would be 'priceless'. What we know now is that what proceeded would a mesmerising performance featuring an ever-growing band, an evolving stage set and of course that oversized suit. And throughout it all David Byrne stood at the centre like a lone creative protagonist in the Talking Heads story.

'Stop Making Sense', the film and live album captures a summary of the band's journey from new wave troubadours to uber-groove funkateers. It was a journey that became largely attributed to the leadership of David Byrne, production of Brian Eno and their cultural tourism approach to music collecting. From the great American songbook, onto the raptures of soul and funk, and in the period that followed their second album 'More Songs About Building and Food', the brotherhood of geek, aka Byrne and Eno, became sonic ethnographers continually capturing sounds on the airwaves and in the field throughout the deep south of America and West Africa.

The legendary album that was a direct result of these travels, 'My Life in The Bush of Ghosts', placed Byrne deep in the role of Talking Heads' sole sonic adventurer. His co-pilot Brian Eno. The band in for the rise in the passenger seats..

Except that wasn't actually the truth. While 'My Life...' was being constructed Jerry Harrison had started working with a host of New York's finest funk musicians on what would eventually become his debut album 'The Red and the Black'. So when the Heads and Eno convened to work on the funk-fuelled genius of 'Remain in Light' it was Harrison who brought the added musicians and to a major extent, the sound. Like 'My Life...', Harrison's album wouldn't see the light of day until after 'Remain in Light' and the supporting tours.

The first fruits of Byrne and Eno's oft-claimed Afro Beat obsession would seep into 'I, Zimbra' from the 'Fear of Music' album, a track that was directly inspired by the incredible music of Fela Kuti. While a lot was made of the huge influence of Eno and Byrne's joint love of Afro Beat on the 'Remain in Light' sessions the only real attempt at assimilating the sounds of Nigeria and Ghania came on the failed jam 'Fela's Riff'. The African stylings of 'Remain in Light' came through the use of West African polyrhythms and call and response vocals throughout. Authentic Afro Beat it wasn't. In fact, it was even more deeply inspired by hip hop's emergence. Which brings us to the vital rhythmical ingredient of the Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz's experiments in NYC urban beats

and Bahaman groove, the Tom Tom Club. A duo who that already deeply ensconced in the NYC Bronx beat hip hop revolution.

'Stop Making Sense' presents the Talking Heads as David Byrne, the eye of the creative storm. It charts the band's evolution from 'Psycho Killer' to their 1983 commercial breakthrough album, the Eno-less 'Speaking in Tongues' album with a brief Tom Tom Club interlude (sadly no room for Harrison's 'Slink' which had been a highlight of the band's live set in 1982). The performance opens with Byrne, closes with Byrne and only Byrne gets the scene stealing oversized suit. Despite Byrne's rampant egotism and monumental lack of empathy for his fellow Heads, this performance captures the band at its incendiary best with the teeth-on-edge anxiety of Byrne's studied stylings fusing with the dexterity and sheer musical muscle of his counterparts.

Take the brittle funk of 'Found a Job' in which Harrison's Afro guitar picking plays counterpoint to Weymouth's syncopated b-lines as Frantz provides solid, spacious and swinging backbeats. Any doubts that this band could funk without the added ingredients of former members of Funkadelic are thrown into the garbage for good. But when the rest of the performers do emerge that funk shifts from brittle anxiety to a juggernaut groove. 'Slippery People' brings gospel to the bongo driven electro vibes, 'Burning Down the House' is a raging inferno of synth bass driven, running-on-the-spot energy while 'Life During Wartime' brings new life to an old classic as the band kick up a XXXL party-sized storm – Bernie Worrell's synth solo tearing a hole in the soundsystem for good measure. If 'this ain't no party' as Byrne claims, then I've no idea what is.

The set continually builds at this hyperactive pace with little room for a breather beyond the queasy psycho-funk of 'Swamp' and the Malian electro blues of 'This Must Be The Place' until, following a blistering rendition of 'Once in a Lifetime', Byrne departs and Tom Tom Club take the spotlight for the sweat soaked, party hard joy of 'Genius of Love'.

Just as you think that this can't be topped Byrne returns in his iconic and mythologised giant oversized suit, obliterating the Tom Tom Club moment in the process. The suit takes control, Byrne becomes a pinhead puppet, cranium twitching between voluminous shoulders until he dons a red cap, takes off the jacket and he adopts the demeanour of a double plus-sized dad at little league. It's a performance of American grotesque that temporarily overshadows the music until the closing 'Crosseyed and Painless' brings the band to a rock charged crescendo.

'Stop Making Sense' is the Talking Heads biography. It tells the story of a singer who only saw himself, and a band who were empathetic enough to really 'see' the singer. It's a story of a white band journeying though a cultural exchange with the righteous, visceral, communal passion of African America's blues, soul and funk songbook before becoming engulfed in one man's oversized suit as individual artistic statement. It's a story of ego over family, self-obsession over collective expression. But above all it's the story of worlds colliding in a work of pure genius. ●

BLITZED REVIEWS

LANDSCAPE A GO-GO

LANDSCAPE A GO-GO / *The Story Of Landscape 1977-83*

By Imogen Bebb

Landscape...Landscape...now what was their song called...it came out in 1981, didn't it...or maybe it was '82...I can never remember what it's called...it's always a question on PopMaster and I never get it right...Landscape... Landscape...'

If you're currently finding yourself muttering these exact words (or something very similar anyway), let me put you out of your misery.

Landscape was a group formed in London in the mid-70s by Richard James Burgess, Christopher Heaton, Andy Pask, Peter Thoms and John L. Walters. The song they recorded that you might currently be trying to remember the name of is the oddly beguiling 'Einstein a Go-Go' (UK number 5, 1981), although contrary to popular opinion this wasn't the group's only chart hit, with 'Einstein a Go-Go's follow-up 'Norman Bates' hitting the lower echelons of the UK charts later in the year.

But although it's likely that most people will consider Landscape to be nothing more than a footnote in a book about '80s music or the subject of a slightly obscure question on Ken Bruce's PopMaster, when you delve a little deeper it turns out that the group actually has a highly interesting, multifaceted history - and a good deal of interesting, multifaceted music to go with it.

And this is exactly what this new 5CD collection - aptly titled Landscape A Go-Go - sets out to prove. Comprising 84 remastered tracks (with 22 of these never having been released before), it claims to collect "the seminal catalogue from the synth-pop pioneers who spearheaded a new electronic movement", and also includes archive photos, press cuttings, original artwork and brand-new sleeve notes in the accompanying booklet.

It all sounds - and looks - pretty good so far. But what about the music? Is it worth listening to?

Well, as one might expect from an "exhaustive" box set such as this, there are some real gems to be found on here but also some real duds as well. As much as the band claim to have "pushed the boundaries of the hi-tech revolution in a way practically unrivalled elsewhere", this boundary-pushing seems to have a very specific sound, the novelty of which could potentially wear off quite quickly. As a result you'll probably know immediately if the music is your bag from listening to just one or two tracks - the instrumental opener of the band's eponymous 1979 debut album 'Japan' perhaps, which can only really be defined as quirky, bass-driven synth-pop that sounds like it should be the theme tune to a sitcom set in space, or the minimal sleaze of 'Manhattan Boogie Woogie', the title track of the band's third and final album released in 1982.

However, if you're already familiar with some of these more obscure tracks, or if you hear one or two and find it's love at first listen, it's quite likely you'll get hours of listening pleasure out of this box set. Even if you simply went out and bought 'Einstein a Go-Go back in 1981 and find that you still enjoy listening to it today, you'll probably find something to love amongst these 84 tracks.

But the intriguing thing about this set is that it doesn't lean on the band's (admittedly brief) chart success to tempt buyers. It almost does the opposite, setting out to change listeners' preconceptions about the band's music by actively offering a detailed look at their back catalogue.

"Think you know Landscape?" this set seems to ask. "Well think again." ●

Landscape A Go-Go: The Story Of Landscape 1977-83 is released 21 July via Cooking Vinyl

BLITZED REVIEWS

MARC ALMOND

MARC ALMOND / *Open All Night*

By Simon Heavisides

Marc Almond long ago ascended to the ranks of artists whose back catalogue is so rich and rewarding you can lose yourself in it for days, or maybe even weeks. The twists and turns, the commercial, the not so commercial, hits, misses, even stuff you might not like right now but perhaps will somewhere down the line.

On top of that his current output still includes vital gems. This story is thankfully not over.

Marc's ongoing reissue series, released via Cherry Red Records subsidiary Strike Force Entertainment, has been hugely refreshing in a world of 'bells and whistles' box set excess and suitably inflated prices. Modest, but still stuffed with masses of bonus tracks offering fantastic value for money.

Going back further to 2016's mammoth ten-disc box set Trials of Eyeliner, it was clear that while living firmly in the present as any artist of worth should, Marc cared deeply about doing justice to his past. Sadly out of print, it was a real 'treasure chest' of almost overwhelming depth and diversity.

Open All Night itself was reissued in two-disc format back in 2010 but has been scarce and increasingly pricey for some years now, so this even more generous version is very welcome for anyone who missed out last time, featuring a massive 47 tracks over three CDs. Extras comprise B-sides, demos, alternate versions, remixes and live tracks and includes plenty that you will want to hear more than once, unlike many 'bonus' add-ons.

The mid-nineties became a difficult time for Marc. After the epic and bruising experience of the Fantastic Star album it must have been a relief to experience the surreal pleasures of working with '60s law unto himself P.J. Proby. Once that refreshingly enjoyable project was complete Marc found himself needing both a new manager and a new record label, having finally parted company with Stevo and asking to be released from his Mercury Records contract.

It was clearly time for a fresh start.

Enter Vicki Wickam and, at least initially, Chrysalis offshoot, Echo Records. But these were turbulent times for the music industry and within a few months Echo found itself with a new boss who was both not a fan of Marc's music and also was facing the challenges of managing a label for whom success appeared to have dried up. Cue Marc's request to leave and take his newly complete album with him.

It was the right move and marked the beginning of the next stage in Marc's 'career' namely true independence and the responsibility that comes with it. Marc formed his own label Blue Star which was home for the next few albums.

Stylistically Open All Night felt like a record that would be an excellent entry point to Marc's catalogue while at the same time highly likely to appeal to the faithful without being a simple retread of the past.

Opener "Night and Day" sashays in on a middle eastern inflected intro with the crackle of scratched vinyl in accompaniment before the beats thud and we're back in Marc-world. Electronics mesh perfectly with violin, accordion and tabla. As a piece of music, its languid and atmospheric and sounds absolutely beautiful via headphones.

The age of Marc Almond hit singles was probably over at this point, but that doesn't reflect the quality of the songs on offer throughout Open All Night.

"Black Kiss" had already been released by Echo as a limited edition single and is a thrilling dose of lascivious electro propelled by some dirty guitar from Neal Whitmore.

And then there's Siouxsie. A match-up that seems entirely logical but was a long time coming, "Threat of Love" is as sultry and seductive as you'd hope it would be with such a dream team involved.

Sound-wise the reissues to date have all been excellent, this time there's no mastering credit (or historical liner notes) so this may simply be a clone of the original disc which sounded pretty good anyway.

If you're a long-time fan there's still stuff here you probably won't have and if this is your first encounter then three and a half hours of pleasure await. ●

BLITZED REVIEWS

80S CLASSICAL

80S CLASSICAL / *Volume 1*

By Mik Scarlet

The Orchestra of the North and a selection of 80s stars along with vocalists Adetoun Ayoola, Gavin Conder, Cliff Masterson come together to get funky in a classical stylee. A sign of age maybe, but as this album kicks off with a riotous version of 'Can You Feel It?' I'm already hooked... on classics. It's a mixed bag of mostly 80s pop hits, and next up is Nik Kershaw's 'Wouldn't It Be Good', featuring the man himself. Hearing the main hook played by an orchestra creates a more dreamlike version of a track I adored back in the day. I think I prefer the original if I'm honest but as this is a live recording it must have been something live. Next is T'Pau's 'China In Your Hand', with Carol Decker on vocals. Wasn't a big fan of this when it came out, but this version is stunning. Funny how some tracks really work with orchestras. It soars as the orchestra so compliments Carol's voice.

Next it's Johnny Hates Jazz and 'Shattered Dreams' and then Toto's 'Africa'. At this point I'm starting to wonder who this album is for. It's very nice; superb versions whether the original stars are performing or not, but many of the tracks are so near to the original I'm not sure if you could just create a playlist for that dinner party you're having. Johnny Hates Jazz returns for 'I Don't Want To Be A Hero', which again is nice. Nice? Is that what's wrong? It's so polished as you'd expect from a professional orchestra, but is it right for pop? Horses for courses I suppose. Nik Kershaw joins for a very different version of 'Human Racing', very blues jazzy baby, with an almost Bond theme feel. This is what I was wanting. Using the orchestra to do something different, something that used the wonder of a full orchestra.

The proper use of the orchestra continues with their version of 'Sweet Dreams'. Again, the Eurythmics classic becomes something entirely different, vast and swirling before twisting into a superb version of the original. Adetoun Ayoola is stunning and adds her own take on Annie's gorgeous vocals. I love this track. Mr Kershaw is back for 'The Riddle' and again makes great use of the orchestral possibilities. This track always sounded like it needed a full orchestra so it really works. Carol Decker next with 'Heart And Soul', and then Johnny Hates Jazz with their classic 'Turn Back The Clock' before ending on the orchestra's version of 'St Elmo's Fire'. The last track is a remix of 'I Won't Let The Sun Go Down On Me' by synth wave maestro L'Avenue.

All in all, it's a nice album. Again, that word, nice. I expect if you enjoyed the live events, this will bring back happy memories. For me, I'm not sure when I'd play it. I have pretty much every track on this album in their original form and would probably play them, if I played them at all. But if you love an orchestra and 80s hits, this will be the album for you. ●

BLITZED REVIEWS

MATT MONRO

MATT MONRO / *The Complete EMI Recordings 1971-1982*

By Mik Scarlet

Matt Monroe? In Blitzed? A crooner in a magazine for 80s-influenced electronic music? Eh? Wait, I say. Back in the day, the singers we all love from the 80s, many were so heavily influenced by Matt Monro that when I heard Cherry Red were releasing a compilation of his works with EMI I had to get a copy to review. His voice shaped most of the male - and many female - voices that filled the charts in the 80s and ever since. I have to admit I love Matt Monro and I hope I can get you all to feel that love too.

This compilation features four CDs of tracks of absolute classics. It's a one stop shop of all things Monro. Oh, goody this is going to be a fun review. Great package, lots of information on the music within but let's get to the music.....

CD One kicks off with Matt's version of 'Singing In The Rain', and from that moment you are suddenly in a smoking jacket, Jack on the rocks in hand, cigarette in the other, sauntering on the deck of a yacht docked in the harbour at Cannes. It's pure class and pure magic. As each track rolls treacle voiced out of my speakers I'm in rapture. The height of cool, the height of style. The tracks go from simple with that voice, to big production numbers, with that voice. CD Two is more of the same, more gorgeousness. More tracks that you might know on this CD, with his versions of 'Let There Be Love', 'What A Wonderful World', 'When You Wish Upon A Star' and much more. There's even a cover of 'No Regrets', but not the Midge Ure cover, but an English version of 'Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien'. This CD is much more one to play to someone to bring them into the Monro fold. CD Three and we have more honey, but a little more 70s influenced swing here. You can feel the flares coming through the speakers on this one. Very easy listening yet with his voice oozing cool. I don't know many of the tracks on CD three but it's a journey of discovery. CD Four ends this jam-packed compilation with some really groovy stuff daddio. It charts Monro's change as he tries to keep up with the times, and I kind of like it. There's almost a touch of disco. His version of 'When A Child Is Born' is hyper cool and the version of 'You Are My Sunshine', which closes the CD, is about as hip and music can be and so Vegas. This CD is one to put on when you want to be post cool and ironic for sure.

Each CD has over 20 tracks and each is pure gold. OK, this isn't your usual synth-packed electronic recording but I would advise any fledgling singer to get this and practice along to a voice from the Gods. I also wonder if there are a myriad of possible cover versions on here, that would make perfect electronic tracks. Whatever, it's a great compilation of a voice for the ages. ●

Matt Monro: The Complete EMI Recordings 1971-1984 is out 23 June via Cherry Red

18+

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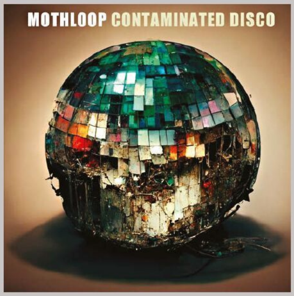
BLITZED REVIEWS

REVIEW ROUNDUP

By Paul Browne



MOTHLOOP /
Contaminated Disco

Coordinated by Martin James, Mothloop draw inspiration from the likes of Shriekback, A Certain Ratio, Talking Heads and Heaven 17 on their debut album. "Contaminated Disco is my attempt at capturing the daily chaos of my mind" suggests James. "Beats and rhythms switch at high speed, tracks hyper ventilate wildly, voices stretch and collapse in each other's orbit, lyrics largely ad libbed in an attempt at capturing my chaos."

There are nods to Pet Shop Boys on brassy opener 'Information Dislocation'. The breezier 'We Built This Machine' offers up a rallying call for workers and the shimmering moods of 'Together Apart' are contrasted with some muscular percussion. Meanwhile, there's more of an electro groove at work on 'Quantum Creep' with its robotic, rhythmic drive.

To change the mood a little, '21st Century Requiem' offers more summery flavours - and also features guest vocals from Erik Stein (Cult With No Name).

For those that liked their electronic music to have more of a funkier foundation, Mothloop are here to deliver. ●

Contaminated Disco is out in August via State of Bass

JIGSAW SEQUENCE + MACHINA X /
Late to the Party

Jigsaw Sequence (aka Richard Tracey) produces music inspired by the classic synth-pop era, taking particular inspiration from the likes of bands such as Ultravox, OMD, Depeche Mode, Visage and Alphaville. 'Late To The Party' sees the synth musician working alongside Machina X, who provides vocals on this impressive composition.

Machina X (aka Annie James) has lent her mesmerising voice to a number of collaborations in the past, including Nature Of Wires (their Christmas 2021 cover of '2000 Miles' is a slice of ethereal beauty). Meanwhile, this outing showcases the perfect chemistry between both talents. 'Late to the Party' is simply a polished pop gem; uplifting, euphoric synth-pop that oozes with an insistent rhythm and catchy hooks. The lyrics are also tinged with a sense of loss and regret ("Consequences and casualties/From the wreckage that was us"), but the melodic power of the composition elevates it to somewhere particularly special. ●

machina-x.bandcamp.com/track/late-to-the-party

THE RUDE AWAKENING /
Will You

Electropop duo The Rude Awakening have been keen to pursue some intriguing covers in recent times, which includes engaging versions of 'Hungry Like The Wolf', 'The Power Of Love' and the Gary Numan classic 'Cars'. Previously, Bridget Gray discussed the process of how the duo approach the concept: "The covers we have chosen to do are chosen because they are our favourites, either a particular song or the artist means something very special to both of us."

"When it comes to producing a cover of a track as a homage to someone you greatly respect, we try to put across in our version of that track what it is that makes it such a standout song for us."

On that basis, The Rude Awakening have served up an effective cover of Hazel O'Connor's bittersweet song 'Will You' (one of the highlights of 1980 film Breaking Glass). Here, the fragile quality of the original song is given a fresh sheen with some layered synths while Bridget Gray's wistful vocal delivery gives the song an emotional punch. ●

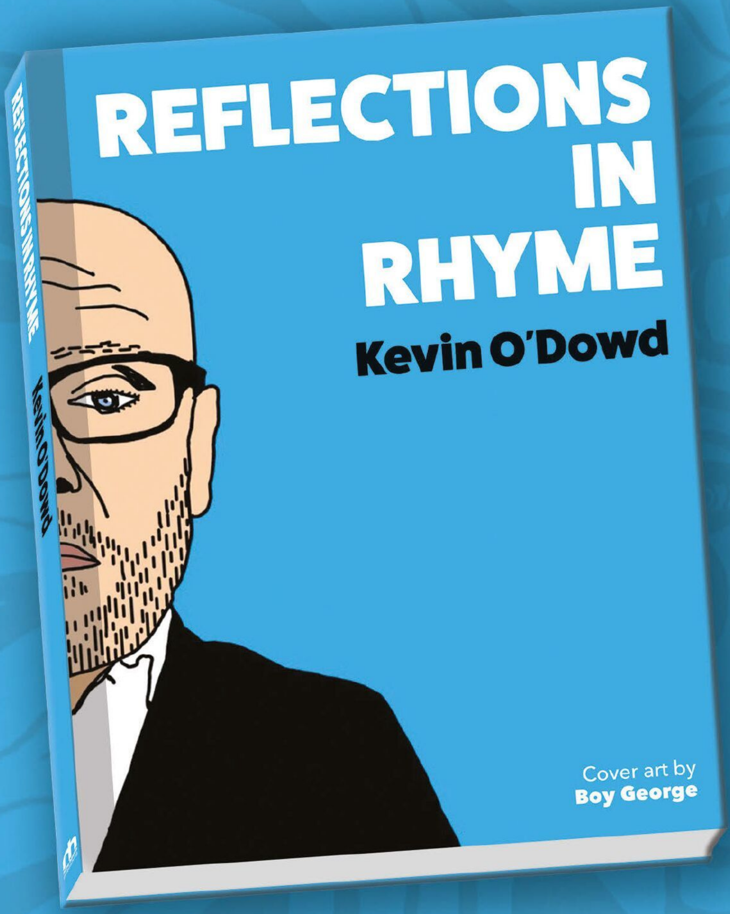
therudeawakening.bandcamp.com

MAGNETIC SKIES /
Suffocate

Darkwave pop outfit Magnetic Skies consists of Simon Kent (vocals), Jo Womar (keyboards), Carlos Aguilar (guitars) and Lenin Alegria (drums). Their particular approach to synth-pop delights has enjoyed critical acclaim and earlier this year they delivered the power pop of 'You Shine On' (A tune which our own Mik Scarlet summed up as "synth based bliss"). The band have also been enjoying an opportunity to show off their live chops lately, particularly via high profile support slots for the likes of Heaven 17 and Empathy Test.

Their latest outing comes in the form of the anthemic 'Suffocate', which provides a yearning synth-powered delight. Simon Kent's vocal delivery has a beguiling, understated power here, giving lines such as "I believed in you until every dream drifted out of view" a dark, romantic flourish. 'Suffocate' presents an iridescent slice of dark pop wonder. ●

magneticskies.bandcamp.com



In this large full colour coffee table size hard cover book, Kevin O'Dowd shares, for the first time, a collection of his poetry. It is raw and sometimes confrontational, but thought provoking and at times brutally honest.

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GIG REVIEW

Photos by Andy Von Pip Photography

By Wesley Doyle

DURAN DURAN AT THE O2

There's always been something schizophrenic about Duran Duran. On the one hand, they're avowedly anti-nostalgia, always pushing forward, trying new ways of retooling their classic art-pop noise with current trends. Their latest album Future Past is a good example: working with a none-more-hip producer Erol Alkin and collaborating with Graham Coxon, Tove Lo, Ivorian Doll, and Chai produced their best album for over a decade. It sounds contemporary and yet is unmistakably Duran Duran.

In the live arena though, the band are a bit more cautious. They still see themselves very much as contenders and want to continue playing huge rooms such as the O2. But to do that they have to lean into past glories to keep the masses happy, meaning their more experimental edge doesn't really get a look in. At the first of two packed O2 shows (of seven UK arena dates), they play only three songs from the current album – 'Invisible', 'Give It All Up', and 'Anniversary' – and they don't play anything post-1995. In total they pass on eight albums worth of material – strange behaviour, indeed.

That's not to say there aren't surprises; after a flashy intro film that shows the band arriving at the arena via a spaceship (but of course), they kick off with the decidedly downbeat 'Night Boat' from their 1981 debut album. It's a ballsy move, and a genuinely exciting one too. 'Last Chance on the Stairway' from 1982's Rio is dusted off and presented in its original iteration for the first time in over 40 years. 'Careless Memories' is back in the set and energetically reaffirms the band's post-punk credentials. While standalone single 'Is There Something I Should Know?' also makes a welcome return, accompanied by images of the band from the days when they were known as 'The Fab Five,' all lip gloss, serious stares, and Diana hair. Certain sections of the audience go suitably wild.

Those songs aside, they stick pretty much to the set they played at last year's Hyde Park mega gig, barely 10 months earlier. Not that it seems to bother anyone – from my vantage point everyone is having a ball. Plus, Duran Duran do arenas very well: the visual presentation is stunning, with the screen projections dwarfing the band and creating a different environment for each song without detracting from John Taylor's cheekbones or Nick Rhode's withering gaze. The sound too is crystal clear, loud, and punchy, with Simon Le Bon fine of voice and shameless of dance – I don't think I've seen any other front person enjoy themselves as much on onstage as Le Bon does. It may be cheesy in places, but it's undeniably infectious.

It seems churlish to find fault with such an accomplished and uplifting evening's entertainment, but to go back to the schizophrenic analogy, Duran Duran have a whole other vibe that long-term fans like me are always talking up: the artier, more experimental side that never gets mentioned in the wider discourse. So, while I understand why the bafflingly deathless cover of 'White Lines' and phones aloft ballad 'Ordinary World' remain in the set (they both get an incredible response from the crowd), I'd love to see the band embrace its darker persona in public, if only for a few shows. Maybe the rumoured Halloween-themed album due this year might give them the chance to do just that. Imagine a set that includes 'Winter Marches On', 'The Chauffeur', 'Out of My Mind', 'Lady Xanax', 'The Seventh Stranger'... I could go on (and on).

But at the O2 tonight, Duran Duran prove once again that they have earned their place at the table of the UK's most iconic bands. But unless they start to acknowledge their weirder, spikier nature, they risk becoming an 80s version of the Rolling Stones, rather than their true forebears Roxy and Bowie. They should unleash their inner Eno, turn and face the strange.

By Jan Blackwell

GARY NUMAN

ELECTRIC BALLROOM CAMDEN

Gary Numan - electronic synth god performed three gigs at The Electric Ballroom in Camden. These were very special shows, numbers 998, 999 and 1,000th concerts of his career. I was lucky enough to be at the 1,000th gig on the Saturday night.

His daughter Raven (and Persia) were supporting him on these special nights, these being her first, second and third gigs. Raven and sister Persia took to the stage, accompanied by guitarist Ben Simon, drummer John Azopardi and on keyboards, Numan's long-time producer Ade Fenton.

The girls looked like naturals on stage and performed with confidence. The songs are clearly Numan-inspired with an electronic sound. Raven has great vocals and is obviously a talented singer, as is Persia who has accompanied her dad on some of his songs previously. It's a short 9-song set, including 'Children Of The Bad Revolution' and 'Pretty When I'm Hurt', but they were obviously well received by the crowd with the odd cry of "Raven!" coming from the crowd.

After a brief pause 'Resurrection' starts playing and Gary and the band take their places. Steve Harris on guitar, Tim Slade on bass, David Brookes on keyboards and new man on drums, Jimmy Vincent Lucido. Then Numan takes his usual slow seductive walk to the mic. Loud cheering continues as the familiar chords of 'Down In The Park' plays out.

Gary, now 65, looks good and, as always, is on fine form. Steve Harris gives us his usual mesmerising dance, which I love! Next up, 'Haunted' from the Jagged album. I've never heard this live and it sounded fabulous. The fantastic 'Remind Me To Smile' takes us to back to the Telekon days, followed by 'The Gift' from The Intruder album. It sounds incredible, especially the instrumental interludes and the way it develops and builds up into the chorus. Back to the Jagged album, 'Halo' is next and straight into one my favourites, 'Metal'. Now in my eyes Gary Numan can do no wrong, but here he did! Numan joked

“I did fuck up ‘Metal’, don’t think I didn’t notice!” and blamed bass player Tim Slade, which led to laughter from the band and the crowd. ‘My Shadow in Vain’ and ‘That’s Too Bad’ from the Tubeway Army days got the crowd dancing and jumping around and definitely didn’t sound their age. ‘Exile’ slowed things down again, followed by ‘Splinter’ and then the song with the best intro ever, the phenomenal ‘Cars’. It always goes down well and tonight was no exception. ‘Is This World Not Enough’ from The Intruder album, brings us back up to date and the Middle Eastern sound is captivating. Back to one of my favourite albums Jagged for ‘In A Dark Place’ and the fabulous ‘Here In The Black’ was perfection. Another from Intruder, ‘The Chosen’, continued the Middle Eastern sound. ‘My Name Is Ruin’ from the Savage album, with another chorus to die for, and the set comes to a close with another from the Telekon era, the great ‘I Die You Die’.

There’s barely been a break in the music all night, while the sound from the crowd is deafening as they scream and cheer for more. The band return to the stage for the last two songs, the beautiful ‘A Prayer for the Unborn’ and the iconic ‘Are “Friends” Electric?’ and the 1,000th gig is over. Numan didn’t speak much between songs except for the occasional “Thank you” and owning up to the ‘Metal’ mistake but then he rarely does. But he was very obviously overwhelmed and grateful to his fans as he said ”I should have prepared something, but to get to 1,000 is special. I’m quite old now, so I don’t know if I’m gonna get to 2,000, but I’m fucking gonna try!”

The venue was dark, sweaty, packed like sardines but no one cared. We have just witnessed another amazing Numan gig and his 1,000th one at that. What an achievement. The music, the dances, the fabulous videos on screen that were relevant to each song playing was just magnificent. Although I’m old enough, I regret never seeing Numan in his early days. I’m certainly making up for it now!

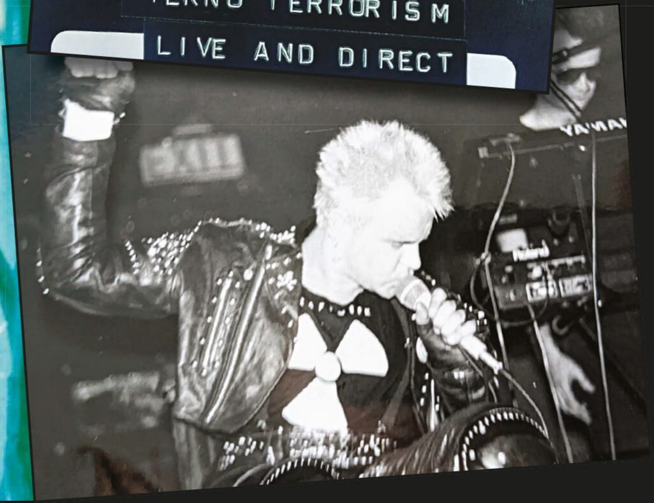
By Mik Scarlet

OUTLANDISH

SUPPORTING NUMAN AND OTHER FREAKISH MOMENTS

The Electric Ballroom in the heart of London's Camden Town holds a very special place in my heart. I pretty much lived there on a Friday from the mid-80s to the early 90s, as it was the best alternative music club going. I DJed there myself, danced, drank, got drunk, partied and met my wonderful wife at the Ballroom. I even played there twice. Once as the headline but the first time, the time that is burnt into my memory, was supporting Gary Numan on his Outland club tour. My band Freak UK, that we stylishly labelled "synth shit from hell", were being managed by Flag Management, part of Flag Promotions under the stewardship of Frank Drake and the late Peter Gilbert. Frank and Pete had been mates and supporters of Gary Numan since the very early days and I knew Gary very slightly, as his amazing mum had been a huge support of my mum when I was very ill aged 15. Beryl used to ring my mum and chat about me as I underwent all manner of surgeries when my spine collapsed, leaving me a wheelchair user. When Gary was looking for a support for this small club tour, he picked us. We were over the moon.

My fellow band member, the late great Big Tony Conroy, left his job as Vauxhall and we packed up my beat-up Mini Metro leaving our hometown of Luton to hit the road in search of stardom and that elusive record deal. We couldn't do all the gigs as I was also recording a TV series at the time, so I spent my days in front of the camera, jumped into my car, hit the motorway, picked up Big Tone and arrived at each venue just in time to sound check. It was a crazy time where we learned how amazing the Numan fan base really are. Within a gig or two the front row knew every word of every song, which was both scary and handy for me as I have always been useless at remembering my words and usually made them up as I went along in some cases. Thanks to the fans I could watch the mouths of the front row and use it as a prompt. It also made me realise the stress on the main act, as if you got a word wrong the whole room would



know. As the tour went on, it became clear that this was a very stressful time for Gary.

The tour was so small for someone that used to play such big venues. It also was struck by technical gremlins on many occasions. The most memorable was Ayr Pavilion, where the fuses blew on the lighting rig as Freak UK was mid flow on our second track. Suddenly the venue and stage were plunged into total darkness and we played on, lit only by a cleaning light, about 60 watts at most, and the light of the bar at the back that seemed to be working fine to the joy of the venue management. As we mucked about with our lyrics, singing about being in the dark rather a lot, Tony and I could see the whole stage tech team ripping the lighting desk apart trying to get something to work. After we came off, to much adoration from the audience who were well impressed at our ability to play on and make light of the nightmare, Gary refused to come on. He was adamant that the lights were vital to the show. The audience got rather... feisty and eventually Gary's dad came out to explain Gary wouldn't come on and give the audience half a show. He offered the chance to get the cost of the ticket back at the box office and a good number left. Oh, how they missed out. Gary finally came on after some lights were fixed and he rocked the roof off. The anger fuelled him in a way I think has rarely been seen. Anyone at that gig will remember it as one of his best.

Eventually we found ourselves on home ground. The Electric Ballroom. Everyone we knew was coming and we were bricking it. We didn't need to be nervous. It was a triumph. We were great, the crowd went crazy for Numan and to this day it is one of my fondest memories. So, when I heard Gary was playing the Ballroom again I had to go. I've not been too well recently, not being able to go out much and less than a month before the gig I'd had major spinal surgery. I still battled my way down the road, as I only live round the corner from the Ballroom now. Raven Numan's performance was great and I see big things for Raven and Persia, who sang backup for her sister. Gary was on form and after last seeing him at Wembley, he took the stage and crowd by storm. I sat, not feeling too great as I really should have been still laid up in bed, watching Raven support her dad being taken back to such a happy time. 1991's support didn't lead to the stardom we had hoped, Freak UK didn't even get a record deal and eventually we broke up. To be honest, whatever we had done the record industry was, and still is, biased against the idea of a disabled popstar. I was even told to my face "what teenage girl is going to want to put a poster of a bloke in a wheelchair on their wall?" but the tour did give me some wonderful, crazy memories.

I won't tell you some of the more salacious ones here. If I ever get commissioned to write my autobiography they'll be in there. Publishers? This is a less than subtle hint!

GIG REVIEW

By Jan Blackwell

MIDGE URE

SHEFFIELD CITY HALL

You know you've been to a great gig when you're still singing the songs in your head days later. This was definitely the case for the Midge Ure gig at the Sheffield City Hall. The first night of the Voice and Visions tour, finally here after a long delay due to Covid.

Tonight's support was the India Electric Co, a male trio consisting of Cole Stacey, Joseph O'Keefe and featuring Midge's drummer Russell Field. The band mostly played their own material - a kind of jazz, folk style, but did give us their version of Springsteen's 'I'm on Fire'. Singer Cole has stunning vocals as well as being a first-class musician, Joseph on keyboards and violin also an outstanding musician. Russell was centre stage on his electronic drum kit. He's an excellent drummer and was a perfect accompaniment.

Midge Ure, wearing a light blue suit and turtleneck sweater, walked onto the stage to huge applause, along with the guys from India Electric Co, now Midge's band also looking smart in their suits, taking up their positions on keyboards and guitars. The show starts with 'Dear God' which immediately gets the crowd singing along. The great 'If I Was' was next and sounded

amazing. Next up Visage's 'Fade to Grey'. I had actually forgotten that Midge was in Visage and it was great to hear. My favourite Ultravox song next: 'The Voice' actually gave me goosebumps! 'No Regrets' and 'Reap the Wild Wind' showed just how versatile Midge's vocal range was. The evening continued with 'Death in The Afternoon', which gave Midge a chance to "show off" (his words) with his guitar. There was great audience participation during the fabulous 'Pain and Glory' with loads more lesser-known songs from the Ultravox era in between. 'Visions in Blue' closes the main event.

After a very short break, they returned to the stage to give us a fabulous performance of the legendary 'Vienna', a sea of cameras to video the moment. It was haunting and just brilliant. Last, but definitely not least, the lively 'All Stood Still' brought tonight's amazing show to a close.

Midge is almost 70 years old now and he played and sang like he was still back in the 80s, every note perfection. He had a little banter with the crowd in between songs and made a point in saying that the last three years had been hell for the music industry and he thanked everyone for coming. What a fabulous night!

By Jan Blackwell

THE DAMNED
LIVE IN LEEDS

Tonight's entertainment kicked off with Birmingham rock band The Nightingales, three men and a lady. See what I did there? It's fair to say the crowd didn't seem overly impressed and, to be honest, neither was I. There were a few admirers who seemed to like them and it was great to see a female drummer taking centre stage. she was really good, but all in all it just wasn't that great.

Thankfully it was time for The Damned. strolling one by one onto the stage: bass player Paul Gray, drummer Will Taylor, keyboards Monty Oxymoron and guitarist Captain Sensible, obviously wearing his trademark red and white stripped T-shirt and red beret. They went straight into 'Street of Dreams' as singer Dave Vanian slowly made his entrance, wearing a black suit, matching Fedora hat and gloves, looking like the old movie version of The Invisible Man.

Tonight, the band concentrated mostly on the new album Darkadelic. Only two songs from the album that, at the time of this review, had been released, 'The Invisible Man' and 'Beware of the Clowns' were well received by the crowd. Before 'Wake The Dead', Vanian said he wanted this song played at his funeral,

but obviously not for a long time! The crowd were a little quiet at times during the new songs but were generally really supportive.

Thankfully, throughout the evening, there were plenty more well-known Damned songs for the crowd to get involved. 'Waiting for the Blackout' and 'Born to Kill' takes many of the audience back in time and it's clear tonight the oldies rule. 'Love Song', 'Second Time Around', 'Neat Neat Neat' really got the crowd going and leaping around like the floor was covered in hot lava. Their version of Barry Ryan's 'Eloise' and 'Smash it Up' were awesome.

Not much banter with the audience tonight, but Vanian and Sensible still have great chemistry between them. The whole band is still confident and energetic, despite their age, Vanian is now 66. Gray never stands still, content to stride back and forth and it continues throughout the 22-song set. Sensible jumped around like a kangaroo, he's just nuts and Monty Oxymoron did his usual crazy dance. The Damned clearly went down a storm, the venue was packed out and very loud and as the concluding song 'New Rose', brought this fabulous night to a close. One thing is for certain, The Damned are bloody amazing live!

Outsiders

by Neil Scott

In 1980, violence was a grim constant in Ireland. School and society harmed -and killed- children. My safe haven was my family, my friends, art and music, though music was proving to be as unreliably violent as the rest of society. I was 14, and as bombs went off, people were shot close to where I lived and I fought to survive a school that was as damaged as the rest of Northern Ireland, two musical heroes met violent deaths. I remember being utterly gutted about both; feeling let down by one, but feeling I let down the other. Their avoidable deaths proved to me yet again that poster heroes were as breakable as the fragile lives I worried about around me. As indiscriminate bombs and senseless sectarian assassinations happened daily, I panicked every day about my father's daily homeward journey through areas in Belfast no one would choose to drive through, every time the Northern Irish news reported "incidents", explosions, controlled or not and "ongoing clashes" that delayed his drive from building houses at interfaces and in Republican and Loyalist heartlands. Ian Curtis's and John Lennon's deaths that year proved that any person on a pedestal could die. My life was fearful.

"Don't speak of safe Messiahs..."

Lennon's death, much more immediate, hit hardest. At 13, I'd discovered the Beatles, and moved on to Lennon, falling in love with 'Imagine' and then 'Starting Over', released towards the end of 1980, just weeks before the ex-Beatle and Jesus wannabe was martyred. Curtis's death only registered when I read it in the music press AFTER the fact. Weeks after. Because I knew nothing of Joy Division until that summer when 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' came out and my older sister uncharacteristically bought a single that wasn't disco and I played both versions pressed into that precious black plastic and the B-side 'These Days' to death. The bitter sweetness of the track... the weird counterpoise of the upbeat music, and Curtis's self-immolation - words of such personal violence, I thought as an immature teen at the time that I must be misunderstanding them. No-one sang about personal failures, surely?

When Lennon died, I vowed "no more heroes." I set the Beatles aside for a while... disappointed their political wing was dead. When Curtis died, I hadn't noticed... and found my adoration of his work came too late to save him. I had let him down, and no buying the new album, Closer, would fix that, but having done so, eventually about a year later, I played it and Unknown Pleasures every single day for over a year... and more.

"...And the bodies obtained..."

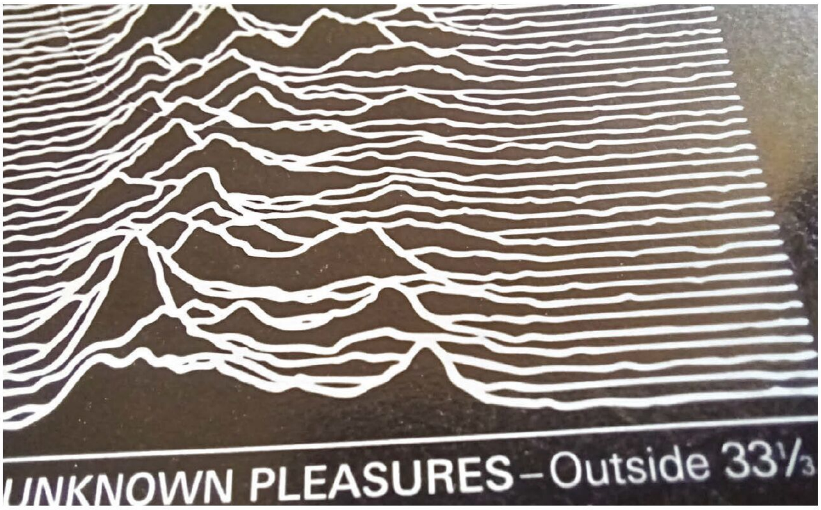
Ulster said, "No!" as Paisley was getting his shirt off, Sinn Fein were going insane, and more people died. The Hunger Strikes... its gonna happen, till you change your mind... here are our young men... where will it end...? Curtis's lyrics, to me, seemed to further reflect what was going on around me. Smash Hits didn't publish Curtis' lyrics, so I had to isolate them from the tracks myself. The streets were lined with grieving women and bitter, threatening graffiti, and explosions

vibrated in the distance while armed men marched through streets, up hills and threateningly into Irish villages in the dead of night.

No-one I knew at the time knew Joy Division, so I didn't talk about them because they didn't fit... until 1983 and New Order hit the mainstream... well, kind of.

When people remember the eighties, they seem to misremember the power of the outsiders. We outsiders helped working class talent chart, but these outsiders were not the fare of the entertainment sections of the mainstream press. New Order was panned by my friends when they appeared on Top of the Pops. But I fucking loved their insolence. Their rebellion. They're not selling out. And I spoke to people about their past. Their lyrics, working class poetry that according to my Wordsworth reciting teachers and my society really shouldn't exist, to the point I thought Curtis MUST be American (until I bought a book of cuttings on Joy Division and New Order in London in 1984, on the day I succumbed to buying Still (the then panned, but wonderful album of offcuts, and early recordings). He sounded American, and only Americans could really get away with such lyrics... in fact, I thought Curtis MUST be an interloper... someone like a poverty tourist who dipped their toes into the murky waters of Industrial Northern England and wanted to sound as if he'd been there all of his puff, only to be let down by that accent. But the truth seeped through. He was a war poet. A poet of our times. A poet that truly reflected the industrial landscapes, a casualty of the war on the working class carried out by Thatcher and her wealthy backers. A casualty of the end of empire. The slow death of the United Kingdom. A young man who was a casualty of an uncaring society - a society that through violent language, violent "comedy," fear and hate belittled and ostracised those with mental health problems.

"A loaded gun won't set you free, so you say..." a lyric that in Northern Ireland as people died around us, meant something quite different to me as Curtis had intended. A lyric that in isolation, I sang in defiance of Loyalists shooting catholic taxi drivers in the



back of the head, and Republicans shooting builders working on buildings they deemed as enemy infrastructure. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters dying to feed someone's bitter, hateful idea of freedom while we all cowered and grieved. And bombs, guns, baton rounds and stones - maiming, violating and killing children and young people. And politicians, religious men and the newly elocuted Thatcher conducted it all and attacked and killed working class people

from Stornoway to Islas Malvinas. And the constant funeral processions. Voices from pulpits,

"Praise to the glory of loved ones now gone."
"I can't see why all these confrontations.
I can't see why all these dislocations,
In this colony..."

The dead poet said to me as I struggled with the politics of my violent land. We outsiders, we who really saw no sense in any of the hatred or the violence, had few places to meet and few places to make our voices heard. And we outsiders bought tracks most of the rest of the eighties deemed weird, "alternative," "arthouse," " New Romantic," "Post Punk, new wave," "indie." And some of my friends really just didn't get it. Few girlfriends ever got it. My first "long term" girlfriend (when I was 17) wrote "boring" and "depressing" on my tape of Unknown Pleasures and Closer, so from then on, I kept my Joy Division close, secret, personal. New Order were different... I could share them and saw them in concert in Belfast and then (paid for by another girlfriend) in London in the mid-eighties.

"...And I was looking for a friend of mine..."

And then, years later as Northern Ireland emerged from fear and violence and I met my now wife, I had to come out. Some knew of my love of Joy Division, but I never shared the music... the poetry... communally with them. Outsiders do their thing without prying eyes or ears. But sharing a life, this part of me; Bernard, Peter, Stephen, Martin and Ian... a sensitive working-class poet, depressive, expressive ordinary extraordinary 23-year-old and the extraordinary working-class talent that put those poems to music, had to share rooms with someone else in my life. I played the songs; that poetry to incredible soundscapes, when I could and I brought her to Peter Hook in the Barrowlands playing the albums in full. "The best gig she'd been to," she said. And my outsider, sensitive, beautiful wife after 25 years said to me a few days ago, "I really like Joy Division."

Mik Scarlet Reviews

After my Goth fest in the last issue, I thought I'd better broaden my search so for this issue I'm aiming for a mixed bag of new bands.

Winter Severity Index

If Depeche Mode and Propaganda had a night of musical passion, Winter Severity Index could easily be the result. Soaring synths, dark vocals, reverb-soaked guitars and style upon style. Their cover of Nico's 'Purple Lips' takes the track into an even darker place of spooky beauty, and the new release LP DISELGO is a dreamscape of wonder. Based in Rome, Winter Severity Index create intelligent, sonically stunning music for the masses.

www.winterseverityindex.com

Nuovo Testamento

Hailing from LA, Nuovo Testamento are 80s high energy pop encapsulated. Their track 'Heat' would have been a favourite on the dancefloors of gay clubs way back when for sure and 'Heartbeat' could have fallen out of an 80s action film soundtrack, as the hero races his motorbike flat out trying to forget the girl who's broken his heart. If you want to grab a slice of 80s retropop, you need Nuovo Testamento in your life! Their new album, Love Lines is out now.

nuovotestamento.bandcamp.com

Flesh Tetris

A band local to me in Camden, Flesh Tetris are gloriously trashy and camp. Funny, taking nothing too seriously, the Fleshies are the perfect mixture of 80s synths and 90s indie pop. If Pulp had joined forces with Lena Lovich with a dress up box, Flesh Tetris are a blast! Another band to catch live for sure, just much less of a distance to travel... especially for me! Cram Flesh Tetris into your life now.

www.fleshtetris.com

Night Sins

Oh, sexy. Night Sins ooze sleaze. 80s and dirty, Synths, dirty guitars and a vocal to moisten knickers, US based Night Sins are perfectly named. The self-declared gothic rock / post-punk band from Philadelphia's new album Violent Age is out now on Born Losers Records and trust me, you need it in your collection. I would so love to see them live as I bet they blow the room away!

bornlosersrecords.bandcamp.com

MELØ

Canadian MELØ's sound is more of that of Belouis Some, which is no bad thing. More timeless than 80s, despite the obvious 80s influences, MELØ is another sexy sultry sound but more classy than Night Sins. The soundtrack for a romp in a 5-Star hotel, 'King of Nothing' captures passion and style. Their cover of INXS's 'Don't Change' is glorious and 'Hopeless Romantic Creatures' is sexy pop at its best. As for 'Black Leather Fantasy'? Hot stuff for sure. Go on, spice up your life with MELØ ....

melomusicofficial.bandcamp.com

Sad Madonna

It's one of the highlights of this job at Blitzed, discovering new music that captures the 80s in me. Sad Madonna are another superb act that are probably more Goth than I promised you for this issue, but the Paris-based act perfectly mix the darkness of the Goth sound with the pop sensibilities of 80s synthpop. Each track has the sparseness of early synth music but with a new twist that comes from adding the later Goth feel to the mix. Be happy and discover Sad Madonna.

sadmadona.bandcamp.com

What a collection this issue! So much amazing music out there. If you have an act that you love but that needs more exposure, from me line and point me in their direction. @mikscarlet on Twitter.

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MARCELLA DETROIT

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YAZOO - YOU AND ME BOTH

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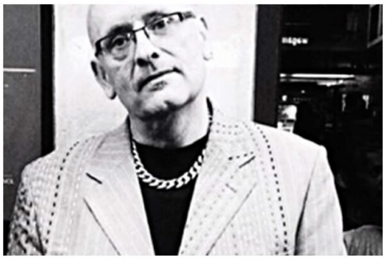
And Another Thing...

By Kevin O'Dowd



It's a fact that fashion trends tend to come around in a never-ending circle. For example, the mod look with short tailored jackets and trousers that almost hug the ankles are a big trend at the moment. The traditional working-class headgear from the 1920s/30s is now also a popular trend with the resurgence of the flat cap and especially the baker boy caps.

I also noticed a resurgence in men starting to add scarves to their outfits, mostly, I would suggest, down to the popularity of the Peaky Blinders look. I've also noticed the surge in what I would call the individual look that was a part of the New Romantic movement, where getting dressed up for the evening wasn't so much about just looking good, but more about turning an evening out into a full-blown event. What I'm trying to say is that today's so-called forward-thinking trend-setting internet influences and, dare I say it, leading fashionistas, seem to have overlooked those who started the New Romantic revolution. The likes of Steve Strange, Rusty Egan, Midge Ure, Mark Almond, Boy George (yes I know nepotism, blah blah blah), but then you can't rewrite history or can you? The likes of Spandau Ballet, Siouxsie and Banshees, Depeche Mode, Duran Duran, OMD, The Cure, The Human League and the list goes on. I have obviously not mentioned the overseas artists and bands of course, many who, in my personal opinion, were astute enough to jump on the New Romantic scene's tailcoats and did so very successfully. But if you were to Google the most influential artists and bands from the 1980s, I think you'll find that according to so-called music experts, the most pivotal players in the New Romantic music revolution are mostly either overlooked or way down the list of the expert's top fifty.

The fact is that bands such as those I listed above all sold millions of records and albums worldwide and are still selling out stadium tours around the globe to this day. Duran Duran has just completed a sell-out UK tour and is currently in the middle of a sell-out European tour and in the past two years OMD have had sell-out stadium tours of the UK and Europe. Culture Club have done two huge sell-out stadium tours of America, Australia, Asia and Europe - and will be touring America again later this year.

When you actually take into consideration that these bands have little if no access to mainstream radio stations and are actually deliberately banned from getting airplay, apart from a few radio stations that are dedicated to 80s music and internet radio stations, such as Radio 365 and South American-based internet stations, I think you'll agree that there is still a huge audience out there for 80s bands, artists and music. Something that today's influencers seem to have overlooked when claiming to be the champions of an all-encompassing gender-friendly inclusive music/fashion scene. When in fact almost forty odd years ago Steve Strange moved up to London from Porthcawl in Wales and not only had the audacity, but was - according to how you would interpret it - either stupid enough or extremely brave enough to walk down the street wearing makeup dressed in what was at the time considered to be outrageous and controversial outfits and considered to be far more controversial than the outfits that were the trademark of the punk movement. As if that wasn't enough, he opened the first real gender-fluid, openly gay, straight night club, the Blitz, with Rusty Egan (who didn't actually wear makeup). All at the moment in time when just butting the trend was enough for someone to attract severe physical violence that was routinely ignored by the police or actually actively encouraged. I've seen it happen with my own eyes several times.

So why am I saying this, you may well ask, and the answer to that is simply because there are enough of us that are huge fans of 80s music, fashion, and culture to actually use our collective buying power. If you like to actually change this ridiculous policy that mainstream radio stations have put in place to exclude the music from 80s bands from their playlists and, again, in my own personal opinion, to actually employ DJs that are dedicated to music, instead of employing wannabe reality TV stars who obviously have no real knowledge of the music they're supposed to be into, when in reality they play what they're told whilst reading from a script provided by the show's producers along with the odd ad-lib thrown in, of course. If only to try to put an end to the current trend of playing the same 30 tracks in rotation, most of which have been selected on the basis that these are the preferred tracks from record companies who's financial input is more important to the radio station's bottom line than the actual quality of the music they broadcast. Just by subscribing to Blitzed magazine proves, does it not, that there actually is enough interest in 80s music to actually make it happen; God, I hope so.

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Soft Cell will be taking to the stage at the beautiful Wiston Estate in Steyning on Saturday 9th September 2023 with very special guests Heaven 17 – and you could win tickets to attend.

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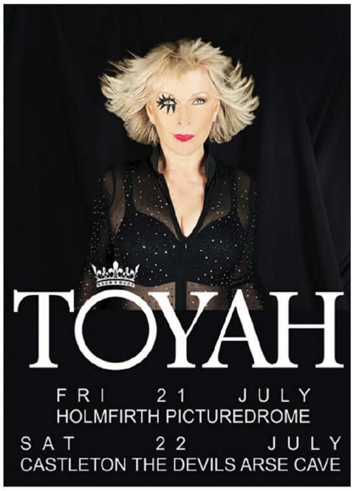
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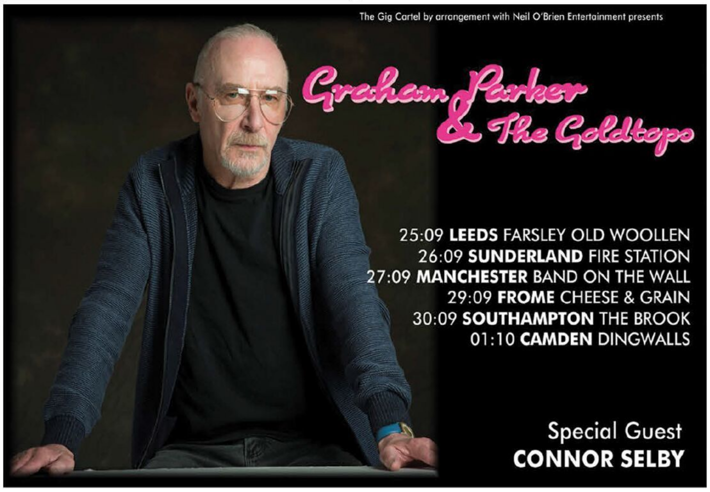
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Analogue Moments
By Mark Buckley

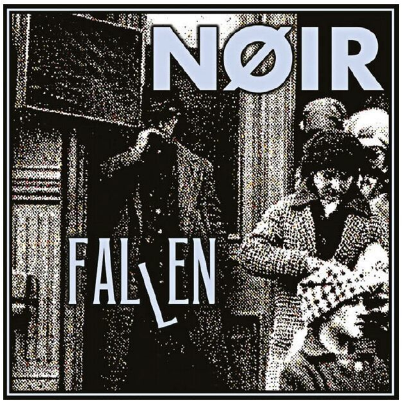
Music seems to be going in every direction at once right now, with reissues, new music, and never-before-released gems competing for our attention. That's why magazines like Blitzed (as well as us humble music bloggers) are so important in my humble opinion – because they bring some sense to a glorious chaos that is the modern music scene. Here's what's been ticking my musical boxes of late.

Brutalismus 3000 – ULTRAKUNST

It's not a criticism of this album to say that it doesn't push any musical boundaries. In fact, that's one of its many charms. A furious blending of early techno, electroclash, and EBM, ULTRAKUNST sees Theo Zeitner and Victoria Vassiliki Daldas put together a series of full-on Teutonic political party bops that seem perfectly designed for dancing the night away. It's abrasive and raw, and a whole lot of fun. While not on the album, their version of Neue Deutsche Welle classic 3ISBÄR is also well worth checking out.
brutalismus3000.bandcamp.com/album/ultrakunst

Mandy, Indiana - i've seen a way

One of the most amazing things about musicians is the way they can be inspired by similar sounds but create something very different. Manchester's Mandy, Indiana also borrows from EBM and techno, but while rhythm based, this is not upbeat party music. Hard yet melodic, i've seen a way is post-punk with a corrosive industrial noise edge. I've seen this band live a few times post-lockdown, so it's been thrilling to discover that the dark euphoria of their rage-filled beats translates so well to vinyl too.
mandyindiana.bandcamp.com/album/ive-seen-a-way



NØIR – Fallen

The Fallen EP sees Athan Maroulis of Spahn Ranch and Black Tape for a Blue Girl team up with guitarist/producer Erik Gustafson once again. Maroulis has a voice and vision that sits somewhere between post-punk anthems and dark synth bangers. Fallen - plus its remixes by Paradox Obscur and Silver Walks - capture that to perfection, a beat-drive darkness that fans of Clan of Xymox, WINGTIPS, and early iterations of The Human League will find of particular interest.
noirnyc.bandcamp.com/album/fallen

Hannah Rose Platt - Deathbed Confessions

London-based Hannah Rose Platt approaches music from a similar world view to Nick Cave and Johnny Cash on Deathbed Confessions. While her vocals have a quality and presence akin to Kate Bush and Siouxsie Sioux, the songs are united by themes like death, love, and murder. File it next to Murder Ballads, The Red Shoes, and Cash's American Recordings album as it expresses beauty and darkness in equal measure over a lush and inviting musical canvas.
hannahroseplatt.bandcamp.com/album/deathbed-confessions

Years of Denial - Suicide Disco Vol. 2

The follow-up to 2019's Suicide Disco Vol. 1, this new album from Years of Denial sees Jerome Tcherneyan and Barkosina Hanusova revisit the outer realms of what could loosely be termed electronic pop. Track after track of dark disco and blackened Italo invite the listener to dance, but also to think, as EBM beats and Hanusova's imperious and seductive vocals seem ready to lead the unwary to damnation or deliverance. If the music of Years of Denial is part of the soundtrack, I'm OK with an eternal after party in Heaven or Hell.
yearsofdenial.bandcamp.com/album/suicide-disco-vol-2 ●

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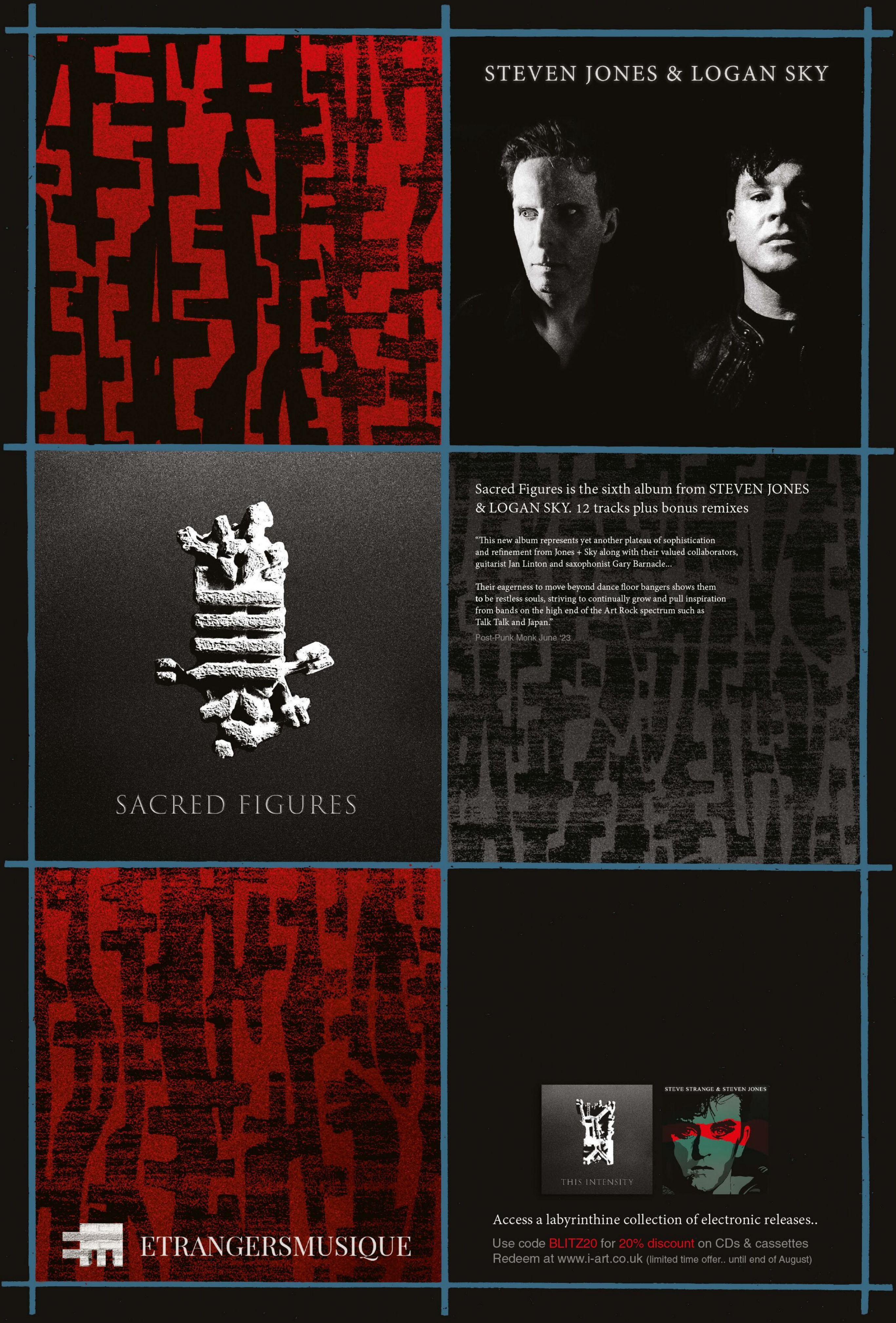
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